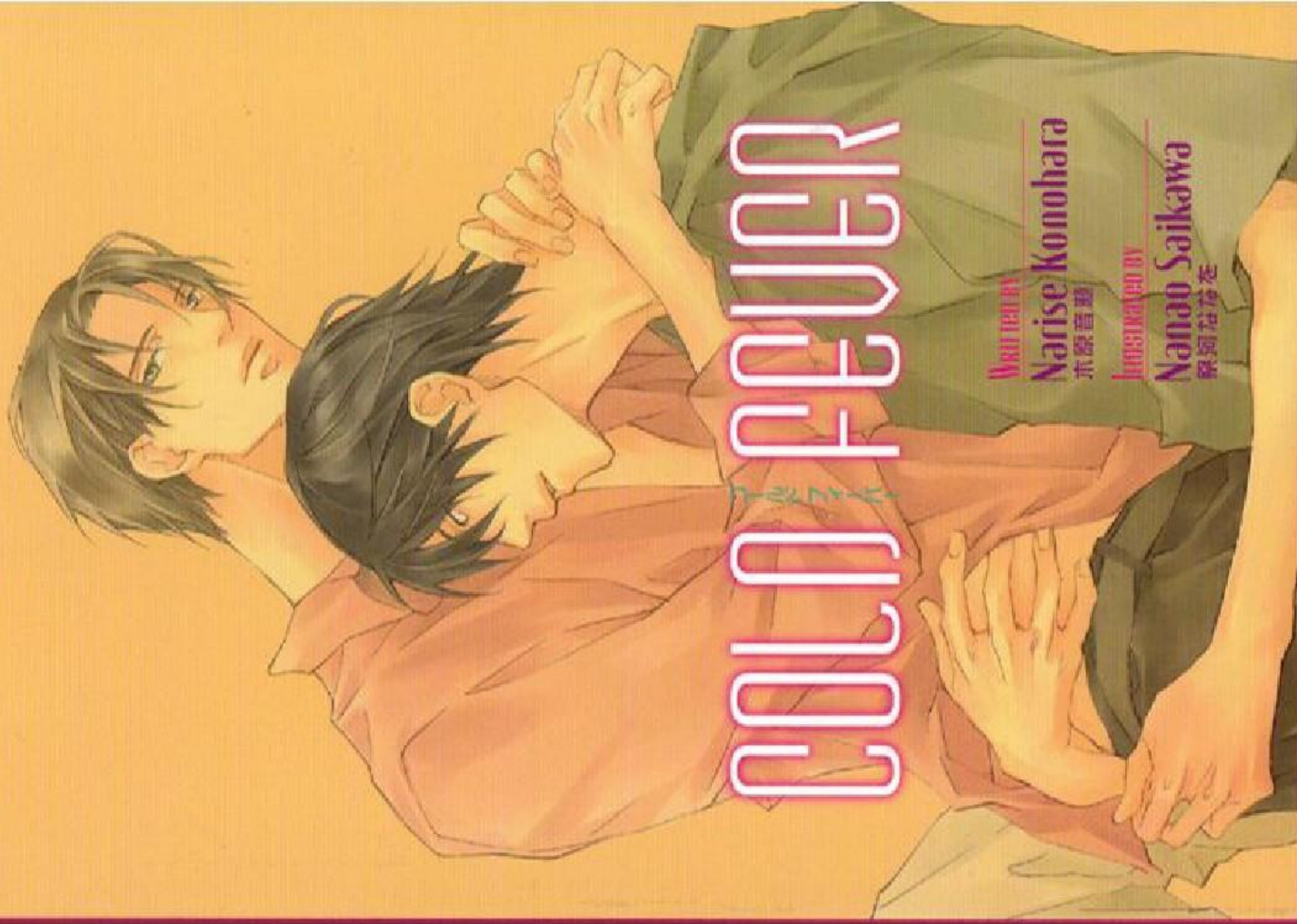




COLD FEVER

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Yaoi 耽美 Noval

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"Tohru felt the touch of fingers to his face. The fingers moved the hair from his eyes... this was the first time that Fujishima had caressed him in this way... Suddenly a part of Tohru realized what he was doing and he pulled back. What was he doing?"



Tohru Takahisa wakes up to find that six years of his life have passed...and that he has no memory of those years. Even more amazing is the fact that he has apparently been living with Keishi Fujishima, of all people—the older brother he despises. Tohru has no clue what happened during the years he had amnesia. When Tohru learns the shocking truth, both men are forced to face their shared history and resolve their relationship once and for all.

The story that began with Cold Sleep and continued with Cold Light, now concludes in Narise Konohara's Cold Fever. This volume also contains bonus stories and the finale of the "Class Reunion" story.



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Fujishima touched Tohru's hand. His touch was so gentle.

"Sorry it's late, but happy birthday."



COLD FEVER

コールドフィーバー

Written by
NARISE KONOHA

Illustrations by
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English translation by
Jenny Jones

PROFILE

Birthday: October 27

Zodiac Sign: Scorpio

Likes: midnight snacks

Dislikes: scales

I've not gotten out much recently. I'm like a cave bear.



COLD FEVER

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Cold Fever

Tohru never slept well, so waking up was always hard. His lack of sleep meant that he started off every day angry. After a day at the office, he would drink himself into oblivion. It was the only thing that alleviated the banality of his life. He wondered sometimes if quitting alcohol was the answer, but he couldn't get to sleep anymore without a drink so he didn't have that option.

On *that* day he woke with a start. He found himself looking up at an unfamiliar white ceiling. Tohru Takahisa sat up in bed. Suddenly his entire body was trembling. It was summer, but he felt so cold. He reached out to the blanket next to him, and pulled it over himself. Tohru wondered why the air conditioning had been set so low.

Wrapped up in the blanket, Tohru took in his surroundings. He was alone in the room and completely naked. There was a trashcan by the bed. Amongst the trash Tohru could see discarded condoms. He couldn't remember having sex. He couldn't even remember how he had got there, or the woman he had been with. Tohru knew he had overdone it last night. He'd been telling himself not to drink, but he couldn't seem to stop himself.

The hour hand of the clock on the wall indicated that it was ten o'clock. It was Wednesday and whoever the girl was had probably gone out to work. Tohru

chastised himself. He was already two hours late for his own job. He was sure to get a stern telling off from his boss again.

He got out of bed to find some clothes. He looked around the room, but he couldn't see any discarded clothes. The room décor was bland and dreary. If he hadn't known better, he would have thought it was a man's room. The only sign of femininity was the dessert cookbooks on the shelves.

He searched the room looking for his clothes. He was still totally naked and his skin quickly rose up in goose bumps. When his search came to nothing, he started hunting for the air conditioner control unit. There was no off switch on the wall though. Tohru frowned and shook his head.

Tohru reasoned that he must have undressed in another room before taking the woman to bed. With this new theory, he left the bedroom. The hall was as freezing cold as the bedroom. He searched the hall, the kitchen and the living room but he still couldn't find his clothes. The chill in his body made him even more frustrated. Perhaps the girl had washed them? He headed to where it seemed there would be a washing machine, and passed by a mirror.

Tohru suddenly stopped. That wasn't his reflection! He didn't think there was anyone else here! He spun round. But there was no one behind him. Tohru turned back round to look in the mirror again. The man was still standing there, but when he looked behind him – no one. Tohru looked again at the mirror a third time, but this time noticed something about the reflection. This man

did resemble himself. As Tohru approached the mirror, the reflection grew larger. When Tohru reached up to his face, the man in the mirror did the same. It was him.

"This can't be possible," Tohru murmured.

His hair was different. He had never worn his hair that long. But it wasn't only his hair that was different. His face, although it was his face, looked oddly unfamiliar too. He looked older.

As he inspected his reflection a wave of nausea crept over him. He wanted to run away. He wanted to run as far as possible from the mirror.

Tohru pressed a hand to his forehead. He tried to ignore what was happening. He told himself he'd been drunk for two days. But...he couldn't ignore the inconsistencies. If he'd been so drunk that he'd forgotten the evening, why didn't he feel hungover?

A shiver ran down Tohru's back. He didn't understand this. He was overcome by an indescribable unease. None of this made any sense. This place was weird. The atmosphere wasn't right. Tohru didn't even feel like he could stand up anymore. He stumbled back to the room he'd been sleeping in. He just wanted to get away from this strange place. But he couldn't go out without any clothes. He'd have to make do with girl's clothes. He opened the closet to see if he could find some girl's clothes that he could get away with wearing. To Tohru's surprise, he found the closet full of boy's clothes. He took a shirt and a pair of jeans from their hangers and tried them on. They were exactly his size.

It was a large place to live in on your own. Tohru assumed that the clothes belonged to the girl's lover or

husband. But that wasn't any of his business. He just had to get out of here.

His own shoes weren't in the hall, but Tohrû felt no guilt in stealing someone else's. He ran out the door. The apartment was on a high floor. Tohrû looked out at the scenery over the railing. None of it was familiar. The wind was strong and it flicked his bangs from his face. Tohrû shivered. It was much colder outside. He reasoned that he didn't remember the scenery because he'd been drunk. However, Tohrû couldn't explain why the weather was as cold as winter. Trying to ignore the inconsistencies in the weather, he took the elevator to the first floor. Stepping out onto the street, Tohrû didn't know whether to head left or right.

He figured that if he could only get to a train station, he'd be able to work out where he was from that. He chose a wide street leading to the right and started walking. All the people that Tohrû passed were wrapped up warmly in wool coats and padded jackets. Tohrû stuck out like a sore thumb with his single shirt. However, no matter how cold it was, Tohrû knew it was summer. This was just unseasonable weather. The day before yesterday there had been a festival here and as he was delivering a package, he had seen the fireworks soaring into the sky by the river.

Tohrû stepped off the big street and saw a sign for a Kasai underground line. He'd never heard of that line. He worked as a deliveryman so he thought he knew every inch of his local area, but he'd never heard of this place. Tohrû climbed the stairs to the station and took a look at the map. He'd never even heard of this neighborhood.

He recognized the large station in the middle of the map but that was it. He was in a prefecture that was closer to Kanto than his own.

Tohrû couldn't quite believe what was happening to him. He asked one of the station attendants which prefecture this was. The man looked baffled, but gave him an answer. Tohrû didn't like the answer. If what the man said was true, it meant that in one night Tohrû had traveled several hundred miles, the weather had turned bitterly cold and his face had changed... He had thought things would start to feel normal again if he escaped from that apartment, but it hadn't shaken the feeling of abnormality. Tohrû was getting increasingly scared.

He tried to think how and why he had traveled several hundred miles in a night. Yesterday he remembered going out drinking in the company car. It was highly likely the car was still parked in the parking lot of the apartment block he had been at. He didn't want to go back, but he could hardly leave the company car behind.

When he tried to go back the way he had come, he turned a wrong corner and stepped into an unfamiliar area. As he wandered round the residential area looking for the tall apartment building, he got colder and colder and more and more frustrated. His feet ached so he stopped on a park bench. The cold wind felt even worse when he was stationary. He looked around him and noticed the withered and dry leaves scattered across the ground. Tohrû realized that he had left his wallet in the apartment. Everything started to seem so futile in the bitter cold.

There was a rustling noise next to him. A middle-aged salaryman had discarded his newspaper into the trashcan that was next to the bench Tohru sat on. Tohru saw something written in the paper. He stood up and picked the paper up. His fingers started to tremble as he spotted the date. The date was January 25th, 20... It was winter... *six years later*... The newspaper still tightly gripped in his hands, Tohru chased after the salaryman.

Tohru called out to the stranger. The stranger looked at Tohru dubiously.

"P-Please... What's the date?"

The man responded with the same date as the newspaper. Without saying a word of thanks, Tohru turned on his heels and next called out to a young girl who had been walking behind him. He got the same answer. The third person he asked also gave exactly the same answer.

Tohru returned to the bench. The sun was setting. This was ridiculous. It was like some cliché TV show where someone wakes up and six years have passed. *Things like this don't actually happen*, Tohru told himself. But what he was looking at was reality. His face was different. The season had changed. He was in an unfamiliar place... If six years had actually passed, he would be older. He remembered being twenty-two, so if six years had passed he would be twenty-eight. But he still had the mind of a twenty-two-year-old. It was like a novel.

However much he pondered, Tohru couldn't come up with an answer. His head ached. He desperately tried to recall the previous evening, but everything became

unclear after the bar. Full of anxiety, Tohru stood up. He kicked the trashcan. It made a loud sound and the contents were flung across the ground. A middle-aged woman walking her dog frowned at Tohru.

"What the hell are you looking at?!" Tohru screamed.

He then proceeded to kick the debris around. He desperately searched for an explanation.

Maybe I'm going mad. I must be going mad. I was never that stable in the first place. Maybe I've just lost it. Gone insane. What the hell do I do now?

Tohru laughed and walked away. He then broke into a run. He didn't know himself anymore. He didn't know where he was running. He was soon by a main street. A large truck passed him by. He ran past shops. He pushed people aside and kept running. Upon reaching a river, without thinking, he continued running down to the banks.

In an instant, he slipped and fell. Tohru rolled around on the ground laughing. Cars were speeding by right next to him. Tohru stumbled to his feet. He rubbed his hands on his clothes. He had to get somewhere, he just didn't know where. Something flashed in front of Tohru.

Ahead of him, a small child walking with his mother pointed into the sky and cried out in delight. Tohru looked where the boy was pointing and saw white crystals falling in vast numbers. He stood there, stunned.

The bars of the prison cell opened with a sharp metallic *clang*.

"Tohru Takahisa, come out!" a policeman in a blue uniform barked.

Tohru stood up. As soon as he walked out, he felt a sharp, stinging pain in his right ankle. He must have twisted it when he took that punch. He felt fresh rage at the pain and regretted not inflicting more damage on his attacker.

Tohru limped behind the policeman down the dimly-lit hall. Standing in the hall in front of the interrogation rooms was the middle-aged detective who had gotten him into all this trouble. Next to him was a man in a coat. As soon as Tohru realized who it was, the corner of his lips twitched.

"Thank you so much."

The man in the coat bowed deeply to the officer. His name was Keishi Fujishima. Tohru hadn't seen him for two years, but in this alternative universe it would actually have been eight years. Keishi hadn't changed much. He must have been around thirty-four now, but he had lost weight and was paler. The overall impression was that of a weak and sickly man.

The middle-aged detective cleared his throat. He started to speak in a very haughty voice.

"This is a rare case of amnesia, so we will let it slide this time. Even though his ex-colleagues weren't hospitalized, there were serious injuries. Please take care that this doesn't happen again."

"We're very sorry."

Tohru wondered why Keishi was here to collect



him... He kept bowing to the detective like some robot whose programming had hit a bug. Tohru glared at him.

"This is the first case of genuine amnesia that I have had to deal with. I had my suspicions that it was an excuse. I was going to send you to a specialist, but the medical report your brother brought was enough for me to close the case," the policeman said to Tohru.

"Thank you so much," Fujishima answered for Tohru.

"You really worried your brother." The detective placed his hand on Fujishima's shoulder affectionately. Fujishima looked even more uncomfortable, and for a moment the situation felt awkward. Fujishima seemed even more panicked and apologized again.

"I'm so sorry. Thank you so much."

Two days before, Tohru had turned up at the police station in a strange town and asked to borrow some money with the lie that he had dropped his wallet. He then went back to the town where he had lived. When Tohru had gone to bed it was summer, but when he woke up it was winter. He still couldn't accept that six years had passed. He thought that as soon as he got off the train, everything would be back to normal.

He purchased a ticket for the fastest train, and after seven hours finally arrived at the station. Tohru was surprised to see the station platform had been rebuilt. It was only a forty-minute walk to the apartment where Tohru lived... but it wasn't there. Instead, he stood facing a long-term parking lot. It was as if the building he remembered standing there just yesterday had disappeared without a trace. It was like he was in a bad dream.

Tohru decided to move on. He headed toward the delivery company where he worked. He was relieved to see the company building looking exactly the way he remembered it. However, he didn't recognize the people who were coming and going from the building. There was one man he recognized—a particularly bad-tempered boss who was in his late forties whom Tohru particularly hated. However, in just one night, like he'd been covered in fairy dust, he had gone aged and bald.

When Tohru approached the entrance, some female employees welcomed him. He asked if he could see Mr. Okabayashi—his boss. A female staff member whispered to his boss, and he came over.

"How can I help you?"

"My name is Takahisa..."

The man hesitated for a moment. "Takahisa... Takahisa..." he said to himself, as if searching through his memory. "Ah! It's you!" he said, and slapped Tohru on the back.

"You seem well. It must have been five or six years since I last saw you. You seem to have recovered well."

"...Recovered..." Tohru muttered. His boss shrugged but didn't seem disturbed.

"It was a nasty accident. Your brother brought your resignation letter in. I heard that your condition was pretty serious, but you seem OK now. What are you doing nowadays?"

As the reality of the situation Tohru was facing started to dawn on him, his throat felt dry. Some unknown accident... a resignation he hadn't agreed to... Tohru seemed to recollect something of this brother, but

he didn't understand why he now seemed to feature so prominently in Tohru's life. Tohru hadn't seen him for two years.

"Is Ishii here?"

Ishii had been the colleague that Tohru had been closest to at the office. He thought that if there had been some sort of accident, Ishii would know.

"Ishii transferred to the head office last year. He had real potential."

"Could you give me his phone number?"

Okabayashi glared at Tohru.

"What do you want with him?" Okabayashi asked, as he eyed Tohru from head to toe. "If you tell me what you want, I'll contact him for you. He's a manager now so he's very busy. Anyway, what is it you do now?"

Tohru was enraged that this pretentious man had no intention of letting him know how he could contact his old friend. The boss had clearly eyed the dirt on Tohru's clothes from when he'd fallen on the riverbank. It must be evident to him that Tohru wanted to ask his old friend for money. Tohru couldn't stop his hand from reacting as the blood boiled in his system. He grabbed at his boss's shirt and screamed.

"TELL ME!"

"ARGH!" his boss yelled. "GET THIS MAN OUT OF HERE!"

A young deliveryman pulled Tohru off of Okabayashi from behind. Tohru was like a caged dog. Being restrained just poured oil onto the fire. He head-butted the man restraining him. As the man stepped back, Tohru followed up with a punch. His ex-boss tried

to run, but Tohru caught up with him easily and planted a kick to his stomach. The young deliveryman recovered and tried to stop Tohru, but Tohru just greeted him with another punch.

Tohru kept lashing out until the police came to arrest him.

Tohru spent two days in a jail cell. The investigating officer was persistent. When the officer asked Tohru where he lived, Tohru gave the only answer he knew: he said he lived in the apartment which had now become a long-term parking lot. The officer would yell at him...

"That's bullshit! There are no apartments there."

Tohru tried to explain to them that he had gone to bed drunk, and when he had woken up six years had passed. The officer laughed and asked if Tohru wanted to go to the hospital. It was the worst two days of Tohru's life.

As soon as he left the police station, his whole body shivered. The night was dark and it was snowing heavily. In a daze, he walked down the streetlight-lit sidewalk.

"The car is in the parking lot."

Tohru heard the voice speak behind him. He ignored the voice and kept walking. Every time he put weight on his right foot, he felt a shooting pain. It made him even madder. The dark cold sidewalk seemed to reflect Tohru's future and the nothingness ahead of him. He had nowhere to live. He had no job. To top it all off, he had completely lost six years of his life. He'd never considered himself lucky, but this was a sick joke.

"Where are you going?"

That annoying voice was still behind him. If they weren't in front of a police station, Tohru would have punched him. If he hadn't been in so much pain from his ankle, he'd have run. The helplessness made Tohru more furious. No matter how far he walked, the voice wouldn't leave him. He stopped in his tracks and turned around.

"Stop following me."

Before Tohru got a chance to finish, he lost his footing. His right ankle stung and didn't allow him to rebalance, and he collapsed onto the snowy sidewalk. Tohru lifted himself up on his right elbow. He looked up and saw a man looking down at him offering him a hand, clearly concerned.

"Are you okay?"

"Don't touch me!" Tohru barked, knocking the offered hand away. He managed to pull himself up, but he must have twisted his ankle awkwardly again as it was even more painful than before. There was no way he could walk on it.

"The detective said that you couldn't remember anything about the past six years. It must have been scary to have aged so much in just one night. I'm here to help you. Please come with me."

His single shirt was wet where he had fallen on it and he was cold. If it wasn't night... if it hadn't been snowing... if his ankle wasn't hurting... if he didn't feel so miserable... if none of these things were the case, he would have hit Fujishima and run far away. Tohru didn't have much choice but to agree. He looked down at his feet and nodded his agreement.

"I'll bring the car round. Wait here."

Something was warm around his shoulders. When he looked up, he saw that Fujishima had put his own coat around Tohru.

"I won't be long."

Tohru watched as Fujishima's slim frame went back into the police station. Fujishima's black coat kept the cold snow out. Tohru pulled it closer around him. It still had Fujishima's warmth on it.

Fujishima and Tohru were related, but not by blood. Tohru was the bastard child of a club hostess and he never knew who his real father was. Fujishima's father met the hostess and decided to take Tohru in as his own son to irritate his wife. Tohru had been ten at the time.

He had lived in the Fujishima household from the ages of ten to eighteen. For a time, he had honestly believed that Fujishima's father was his father. In the winter of his third year of high school, his stepmother told him the true story. She told him that the man Tohru thought was his father was in fact a total stranger. She referred to Tohru as a parasite. From that day, Tohru had been cut off from the Fujishima family.

Keishi Fujishima was the only child of the Fujishima family. The family ran a successful Japanese indigo dye business. He was six years older than Tohru. When Tohru had come to the Fujishima family, Fujishima had been the kindest to Tohru. But it was also Fujishima

who had taught Tohru betrayal.

The only thing that Tohru could see out the car window was snow. Even on getting in the car, he didn't ask Fujishima where they were going. He didn't want to ask. The journey took four hours, and just as the snow had started to disperse, the car entered an underground parking lot under a large building.

"We're here," Fujishima said, as he brought the car to a stop. There was an elevator at the back of the underground parking lot. Fujishima started walking that way and indicated for Tohru to do the same. Tohru followed behind, dragging his injured ankle. When Tohru entered the elevator, he had a bad premonition of what was to come, and when the elevator doors opened on the fifth floor he knew his premonition hadn't been wrong. He recognized this hallway and the door. This was the apartment block he'd fled from two days ago. The place where the nightmare had begun.

Upon entering the apartment, Fujishima invited Tohru into the living room. As soon as Tohru saw the sofa, he collapsed onto it. His right ankle was in severe pain now. It felt like a heart beating away with the pain. After Fujishima left the living room, Tohru buried his face in his hands. He felt the pain soaring up into his temples.

"Here..." Tohru looked up to see what Fujishima wanted now. He was offering Tohru a blue jacket. "You must be cold in just a shirt. It'll take a little time for the heater to warm up."

When Tohru didn't take it, Fujishima draped it over his knees. Tohru just knocked it to the floor.

"I'm not cold!"

Fujishima quietly picked the jacket up and laid it on the sofa. He then sat down opposite Tohru.

"You're tired from all that's happened. You probably want to rest, but we should talk a little first..."

The clock on the wall showed that it was two in the morning. It was the middle of the night but Tohru wasn't in the slightest bit tired. He was more interested in finding out what had happened to him.

There was a short silence; but then, with a sigh, Fujishima began to speak.

"Do you really have no memory of the car accident?"

Tohru didn't answer. He just stared at his feet. The heating hadn't kicked in yet, and he was very, very cold. Tohru felt awkward as he had just rejected the jacket, but he needed the extra layer.

"For the six years you've lost your memory, you've been living here with me. Do you not remember working as a pâtissier?"

Tohru had jerked his head up in surprise at the information that he'd been living with Fujishima. He'd been relying on this man. He couldn't recollect anything about working as a pâtissier either.

"You really don't remember anything?"

Tohru felt frustrated by the pressure he felt coming from Fujishima's gaze.

"Stop asking me the same damn thing!"

Fujishima fell silent. The room was warm but Fujishima's fingers were quivering.

"Sorry..." Fujishima muttered.

"I'll summarize what's happened over the past six years. Six years ago, when you were twenty-two, you sustained a head injury in a car accident. You forgot everything - your name, your age, everything. You had total amnesia. I had just gotten divorced and was living alone, so I decided to look after you. You started a job at a cake shop. You showed real interest in baking and started attending a specialist school. You now work as a pâtissier at a hotel restaurant making cakes."

Tohru frowned. He didn't know who this man was that Fujishima was describing. Every now and then Fujishima trailed off, judging how Tohru was reacting. Each time his eyes searched Tohru's for a flicker of recognition.

"That's basically what you've been doing. Is there anything that you'd like to ask me?"

Tohru looked at his hands. He didn't feel like these hands could ever be skilled enough to bake cakes. Fujishima was saying six years had passed, but it had only been a day for Tohru.

He'd had amnesia for six years, and didn't remember who he was before the accident. But now that his memories from before the accident had returned, he didn't remember the period during the time when he'd had the amnesia. He had returned to the man he was. He was glad of that at least.

What would the point be of understanding things he no longer knew? It would be pointless. Knowing about the six years he'd lost would only make him angry.

Tohru stood up from the sofa. His right ankle lanced with pain again.

"What is it?" Fujishima asked.

"I wanna get some sleep."

"Oh... Sure. You must be tired. Your room is just off the hallway, to your right. If you'd like a shower, the bathroom is just down the hall..." Tohru didn't wait for Fujishima to finish before leaving. Fujishima followed him into the hall.

"Is something wrong with your ankle? You've been limping..."

Tohru entered his bedroom and closed the door with some force behind him. Fujishima didn't try to talk to him anymore. Exactly what Tohru wanted.

The heating was on, but this room was colder than the living room. When he switched on the light, he was greeted by the sight of the room he'd awoken in two days ago. He felt like he was sleeping in a stranger's room. It didn't feel like his.

Tohru rolled on to the bed. He covered his eyes with his hands and sighed deeply. Why had he been in a car accident...? Why was he so unlucky...? Tohru cursed his own fate. If he hadn't been in an accident, he wouldn't have had amnesia and he wouldn't have wasted the last six years of his life.

He had intended to give up his job in six months and go to photography school. He had the application forms and he'd been saving up the school tuition. If he were to go to school now, he'd be thirty by the time he graduated. He knew that he needed to start as quickly as possible if he was going to make it as a photographer. There was so much talent out there and Tohru needed to work hard. But he had lost a whole six years. The

thought made his eyes start to well with tears.

If this was just a bad dream, tomorrow he would wake up and everything would be back to normal. But the six years he'd lost weren't coming back now. Not one good thing had happened to him his whole life. He had been so desperate to be a photographer. It was what he had worked for his whole life. He never thought something this terrible would stop him in his tracks.

This bed was far softer than the one in the jail cell. But even the comfort made him feel slightly uneasy. When he was sleeping on that cold bed he still didn't know the horrible truth. However much he tried to come to terms with it, he couldn't. He wanted to take photos. That was what he wanted. But did he have the money to go to school? If he didn't, he would have to work more. His dream seemed further away. And what about his camera... He had looked after it so carefully, but where was it now?

He winced in pain. His right ankle really ached. Even at rest it hurt.

Tohru lay face down. He had to fight this. He had to fight his demons. But the more he tried, the more he felt his anxieties were going to swallow him whole.

Knock knock.

Tohru heard a knocking on his door. He didn't reply but the door still swung open, surprising Tohru. Tohru looked up and screamed at the intruder.

"Don't just invite yourself in!"

The man at the door hesitated.

"I didn't hear an answer so I thought you were sleeping. I'm sorry." Fujishima was wearing a coat

indoors. He placed a small paper bag by the door. "I was worried about your ankle. You should put a heating pad on it at least... So I brought you one... Goodnight."

Fujishima then slowly closed the door behind him. Tohru listened as Fujishima's footsteps padded down the hall. When Tohru couldn't hear him anymore, he shuffled towards the paper bag. He pulled it open to find a heating pad and a receipt. The timestamp on the receipt was 2:45 a.m. Fujishima must have gone out especially to buy this for Tohru. It was a kind thing to do. However, Tohru knew it was all an act. No matter how much Fujishima played at being nice, underneath it all, he was evil. Tohru knew that Fujishima hated him.

For as long as Tohru could remember, he'd been on his own. He would spend three hours after school with his hostess mother, but when the clock struck seven she would put her makeup on and leave for work. His only company would be the TV. He had craved human company.

When he was in the fifth grade, his mother abandoned him and he was taken in by the Fujishima family. However, he hadn't been accepted as family. He was the odd one out in the household and he was ignored. Keishi Fujishima was the only one who didn't ignore him. Fujishima spoke to him and was close to him. Finally, Tohru had the human interaction and kindness he had craved.

The woman of the Fujishima household resented Tohru. At night, Tohru would go to Fujishima's room to play. He had to make sure his stepmother didn't notice him sneaking into Fujishima's room. He knew it would

get him into trouble. Fujishima gave Tohru clothes that he could no longer wear and lots of books. Fujishima also helped Tohru with his studies. When Tohru was lonely, Fujishima would sleep by his side. He was the first adult Tohru had met who listened carefully to what he said. Just being with Fujishima made Tohru happy.

That was why it was such a shock when Tohru discovered Fujishima didn't like him. He still remembered the tears that stung his cheeks. He had told him to stop, but Fujishima wouldn't. Tohru had pushed Fujishima away and fled to his own room. He was so scared being all alone. He wasn't upset because of what Fujishima had tried to do to him. He was upset because he had made Fujishima angry. Maybe Fujishima was so mad, he wouldn't be nice to Tohru anymore. He wouldn't talk to Tohru anymore. Tohru was all alone again. He'd been left all alone again. That's why Tohru was scared.

A few days after that incident, his stepmother found out about Tohru going to Fujishima's room and had scolded him. It wasn't just a regular scolding though; it verged on child abuse. She beat him with a bamboo broom until he was barely conscious. Fujishima arrived, and Tohru thought he was there to save him. Fujishima was bound to stop this. There was no doubt in Tohru's mind. But Fujishima didn't help him. Fujishima watched. He didn't just watch though, he told a lie. He didn't tell his mother that the books and clothes Tohru had, he'd given to him. He didn't deny the accusations his mother made about Tohru.

It was revenge. Because Tohru didn't want to be touched in his private place, Fujishima hadn't saved him.

Because his brother had wanted to do something bad, he now didn't care about Tohru. Tohru's heart turned black after that realization. The beating hurt so much Tohru thought he would die, but knowing that Keishi Fujishima had abandoned him hurt a million times more than any physical pain.

Tohru was sent to boarding school when he finished lower school. He spent his summer and winter holidays in the dormitory and didn't go home. His friends would ask why he didn't go home; he would say that his parents were dead.

When he reached the second year of middle school, Tohru didn't talk much to others and he became easy prey for the kids in his class. The pocket money that his father gave him each month was quickly stolen by the bullies. He couldn't buy any notebooks, let alone new clothes. He had become a pitiful creature.

The bullying continued for a full year. The bullies soon realized that Tohru's good grades could help them cheat on tests. They devised a way that Tohru could show the answers during tests to the bullies. Tohru knew that he shouldn't do it, but he was so afraid of them that he did it anyway. He was good at letting them cheat. Tohru's and the bullies' test grades were exactly the same. The teacher became suspicious that the mistakes were always in the same places and that they were the same mistakes.

The teacher pressed Tohru, and finally he admitted that he was being threatened and that he'd been forced to tell the bullies the answers. The report about the bullying should have reached his father, but maybe he hadn't taken

the phone call seriously, or the letter had never reached him. Tohru had no expectations in people anymore. If he trusted people, he only got let down. But to not get any reaction made him wonder what worth he had.

Apart from the bullying getting more accomplished, nothing changed for Tohru. He was always called to the back of the school by four classmates for "play" but it was just a ruse to beat him up. Tohru remembered one beating in particular. He had looked up into the sky and realized how beautiful it was. He hadn't felt like that in a while. He wanted to die in that moment. He thought that if they would just kick too hard, then it could be over. He would be dead and happy. It wouldn't hurt anymore.

He wanted to jump from the building that he could see in the edge of his vision. Tohru daydreamed that if he were a bird, he could fly far away.

But a particularly hard kick brought him back to reality. If he died, nothing would change for these bullies. They would snort and chuckle before finding their next victim. Everything would just continue on. A pure rage started to bubble up inside of him. It was the strongest emotion Tohru had ever experienced before. If he died, he wanted to take at least one of them with him.

Tohru slowly stood up. He took a swipe at the ringleader of the four students. The boy fell over. It was far easier than Tohru had thought. He could hear his laughter ringing in his ears as he punched and kicked and bit out at his abuser. The boy cried out, but Tohru kept the punches flying until blood was dripping down his skull. A teacher heard the scuffle and rushed in to stop the massacre. The teacher pinched Tohru's nose until he

gasped for breath. Tohru's victim needed seven stitches. Again Tohru heard nothing from him father.

Now Tohru stood up to the beatings. Before anyone had a chance to lay a finger on him, he would lash out first so they knew not to mess with him. Anything angered him and he showed it with his fists. He looked after himself. Yet he thought of himself as a despicable creature every time he hit out.

In the end the teachers had no choice but to suspend him. Suddenly he was back in the Fujishima home.

His stepmother hated him being there. She glared at Tohru with a look that could kill. However, no matter how she looked at Tohru, she did not hit him. Tohru was no longer that small child she had beaten before. If he could just remember that, then she wouldn't touch him. He had that power now.

That perverted betrayer, Fujishima, now just watched him from afar. He never said anything. If their eyes met, Fujishima's face would tense up. That was enough reason for Tohru and every time he saw Fujishima, he'd hit him. Fujishima was much shorter than Tohru now. Each time Fujishima fell to the floor, Tohru's heart soared and he felt an increasing madness.

After that summer, Tohru would return to the Fujishima house for vacations and expulsions. He went to bully his stepmother and Fujishima...and to see his father. The first time he went back to his home, he bumped into his father in the hall. This was the first time he had seen his father since he had been taken into the Fujishima household. He looked at Tohru, but said nothing. His father never even showed up at the hospital when he was

seriously injured, let alone for graduations and other celebrations. From the wheelchair his father had looked up at him and said, "Don't cause too much trouble." That was all he had said to Tohru. He had repeated the line over and over in his head so many times.

So many times Tohru broke the school rules and was temporarily expelled. Each time he wondered what his father might say to him and what conversation they might have. Tohru was simply waiting for him to say something.

He just wanted his only true parent, his father, to care. Tohru was like a small child throwing a tantrum to get attention. But at eighteen his whole worldview was crushed when he found out that he wasn't his father's child. He was nothing more than an illegitimate child. The one thing that had given him a sense of identity was gone.

Disappointed, he left the Fujishima house for good. He had believed in someone and something so many times and so many times he'd been let down... He didn't need family or kindness or expectations. These things only caused pain. Tohru wanted nothing more than to disappear from this world.

Tohru stared at the heating pad for a moment longer, and then threw it in the trashcan. Still clothed, he buried himself in the sheets. The pain in his ankle, which he had forgotten for a while, returned.

Two or three months after he had left home, Fujishima had unexpectedly come over. Surprised, he opened the door and only showed his face. Fujishima turned up at the doorstep and then left. After that, no

matter how many times Fujishima invited him over, Tohru ignored him. One day Fujishima's lawyer turned up at the door. Apparently it was something to do with the inheritance. Tohru had no intention of taking money from people he considered strangers and didn't listen to the lawyer. The final contact he had had from Fujishima had been a letter. There was no sender's name so Tohru had opened the envelope. In the letter, Fujishima said if anything happened, to call him. Tohru read the note once before throwing it away.

The night that Tohru threw the letter away, he wondered why Fujishima persisted in trying to contact him when he was nothing but a stranger. Maybe Fujishima wanted to tame him with money so he could use Tohru. Or perhaps he was just a pervert interested in what was under Tohru's clothes.

If that was the case...then what would have happened if Tohru hadn't rejected Fujishima's advances when they were young? Maybe he wouldn't have been betrayed so badly.

So many years had passed but still Tohru couldn't let it go. He didn't know why he couldn't let it go... Perhaps it was because Fujishima – though a pervert and a liar – was still the only person who had ever shown Tohru any kindness.

Physical injuries can be healed by time. The same can't be said about a wounded heart. That stays with a man forever.

Tohru couldn't sleep well because of the pain in his ankle. Finally he dropped off around dawn. He woke up some time past midday. As soon as he tried to move to get to the toilet, the pain shot straight through his body. Tohru pulled up his pants leg to find that his ankle had swollen up to the size of a small elephant's. It seemed that the last trip had been the final blow to his injured ankle.

When he tried to take a step, he crumpled in pain. With great difficulty he reached over to the trashcan from the bed and retrieved the heat pack he discarded last night. He took it from the packet and placed it over the ankle. However, he still needed to relieve himself, so slowly he got out of bed. Walking was too painful, so he had to resort to crawling like a dog. As he shuffled down the hall to the bathroom, Fujishima came out of the living room. The house had been quiet and Tohru had assumed that Fujishima was out at work.

"Are you okay..."

Fujishima's eyes were wide with surprise. Tohru was embarrassed to be seen like this. He felt the rage bubbling again deep inside. He chose to ignore Fujishima and continued on his way down the hall to the restroom. He did his business, but the exertion down the hallway had worn him out. He could barely stand. Tohru was stuck in the bathroom. There was no way that he was going to be able to leave in this state. He could still sense Fujishima in the hall. After he'd been stuck in the restroom for a few minutes, Tohru heard a knocking at the door.

"Are you having stomach troubles? Do you want

me to get you some medicine?"

"No... I'm fine..." Tohru said in a quivering voice. His ears were burning with embarrassment.

"Don't be embarrassed. Lots of things can cause digestion problems. You've had a lot of stress..."

As Tohru tried to stand on his right foot, Fujishima entered.

"I said it wasn't that!"

Fujishima hesitated for a moment. Tohru was standing, but he still wasn't going to be able to walk like this. He didn't see any other option than to just stand there. He could crawl, but Tohru didn't want Fujishima to see him crawling on the floor like some wretched dog, though. He'd rather die.

"Okay, if you're sure..." Fujishima trailed off as his eyes stopped on Tohru's huge right ankle. Tohru was holding his right foot off the floor. He quickly tried to hide it behind his left foot.

"Let's go to the doctor," Fujishima said sternly. "I didn't know it was this badly swollen. You must have it looked at."

"Whatever! I just need to rest," Tohru spat back.

"You're in so much pain, you can't walk! It's serious!"

"Shut the hell up," Tohru crossed his arms and shook his head. He accidentally put his right foot on the floor as he did so. The pain was unbearable. Tohru crumpled to the floor. The pain was so great he couldn't even yell out. After a while, he heard Fujishima call his name. When he looked up, Fujishima was down at eye level with him.

"If walking is tough, lean on me. But we should go to the doctor," Fujishima offered his right hand and Tohru took it. Making sure not to put weight on his right leg, he shuffled down the hall, his face screwed up.

Fujishima was small and slim. Standing side-by-side, Fujishima was much shorter than him. He had lived with the man so he should've already been aware of this basic fact, but truth be told, it was the first time he'd noticed.

The trip to the doctor was a success. Tohru had only sprained his ankle. Fujishima was happy that Tohru hadn't broken any bones. Tohru was happy that they had gone to the doctor too because he'd gotten a crutch. Now he wouldn't have to resort to crawling along the floor. He'd also received some very good medicine that dulled the pain.

Tohru was upset, though. He didn't like that he hadn't been able to take the pain and he had had to resort to letting this man help him.

It was five o'clock when they arrived back at the apartment from the hospital. It hadn't been a long journey but Tohru was tired. He went to his room to lie down and fell straight to sleep. When he awoke again, it was pitch black. The digital clock read 7:30.

Tohru's stomach grumbled loudly. It made him realize that he hadn't eaten anything all that day. That thought made him hungrier. He thought about going out to buy something, but he didn't know what shops there were near here and he had no money. He felt thirsty, too. He went to the kitchen to try and find something to drink. He was drinking some water out of the tap

when suddenly the light came on. Tohru looked up and Fujishima was standing there.

"You're awake," Fujishima stated. "Want some food?"

Tohru said nothing. Fujishima walked over to the table. There were two bento boxes on the table. Tohru hadn't noticed them there in the dark.

"Do you want something else?" Fujishima seemed a little panicked by the lack of reaction from Tohru. Tohru hadn't been staring at them for that reason, though. Silently, Tohru walked over to the table and sat down onto the chair a little clumsily. He tore the cellophane wrap from one of the boxes and opened the bottle of green tea that was placed nearby. Fujishima sat down opposite him and started to eat.

The two of them said nothing while they ate. Tohru didn't try to start a conversation and neither did Fujishima. Yesterday Fujishima had told Tohru that they had been living together. Tohru wondered if either of them cooked, but thought he'd be happy to eat like this anyway.

The food was a little salty, but it hit the spot. Tohru also considered the fact that Fujishima was divorced. That was the reason he'd given Tohru for them living together now. Tohru felt a little sickened that a pervert like Fujishima who tried to touch a little boy could get married. Tohru smirked. But what did it matter? It wasn't like *he* was married.

Fujishima only ate half of his meal before standing up. Fujishima, when Tohru finished his meal, had made some coffee. The coffee smelled and tasted delicious.

Fujishima took a sip before leaving the room. He quickly returned though, and placed an insurance card on the table.

"This is yours. We were in a bit of a hurry so I took it from your room," Fujishima explained.

Tohru stared at the card.

"Your passport and name stamp are on your shelves. You got a new passport while you were still suffering from the amnesia. You got a new one for..."

Tohru picked up the card and thrust it into his shirt pocket. He was about to stand up when Fujishima stopped him.

"Wait! There are so many things I still have to tell you." Tohru sighed, and resigned himself to sitting back down. Fujishima looked relieved.

"I told you a little last night. Remember I told you that you worked in a hotel restaurant baking cakes? I spoke to the hotel and told them that you weren't well, so you had to take a day off. What do you want to do about your job now?"

Tohru hadn't expected a question like this. He didn't know how to cook! He hadn't even considered the problem of a job.

"You said that you don't remember anything of the last six years," Fujishima continued. "I asked the doctor, and he said that cases where the person forgets the time when they had amnesia after they recall their original lives, often don't regain those memories." Fujishima stopped abruptly; and then continued on. "You don't remember your life as a pâtissier. So you have to decide if you want to try to learn the job again or try something

different."

Fujishima spoke in a very serious tone at this point. "It's a hard decision to make..."

"I want to quit," Tohru replied immediately. Obviously this wasn't the difficult decision Fujishima was anticipating, and he jerked his head up immediately to stare intently at Tohru.

"Are you sure? You won't regret it?"

Tohru shrugged. "I don't remember it, so what is there for me to regret?"

There was a short silence.

"Okay," Fujishima muttered. "You should go and tell the restaurant that you can't continue your job anymore."

Tohru didn't reply.

"I have work tomorrow so I can't take you to the hotel, but I'll call a taxi for you. You won't have to walk then. It's a large hotel and the taxi driver should know it. I'll give you a map and also my cell phone number in case you get lost..."

"I won't be going anywhere," Tohru said. "The man who had that job wasn't me. It has nothing to do with me, and there is no way that I'm getting involved in someone else's business."

"It doesn't matter how much you've forgotten, you're still you. The chef at the hotel is a really nice person. He liked you. You should at least give him a final farewell."

"Shut the hell up!" Tohru screamed, and banged his fist down hard on the table.

It was a huge explosion of noise in an otherwise

quiet evening. It made Fujishima shake.

"I said I won't go!"

Tohru tensed his muscles. He wanted Fujishima to know that he wouldn't hesitate to hit him. He wanted him to feel fear. Making people fearful was something that came very naturally to Tohru. People were idiots after all. Their basic instinct was to run from danger.

"What's the harm in saying a final farewell?" Fujishima managed to say, but he was almost choking on his own words. He seemed terrified of Tohru. "You might have forgotten, but you still worked there. You should at least say a thank you to the people who looked after you."

It wasn't that Tohru didn't understand what Fujishima was saying, but everything was just making Tohru angrier.

"You can say what you like. You don't know anything about what I'm going through! I wake up one day and six years have passed! And in this crazy alternative universe, I'm living with you! How could you even begin to understand how I feel?!"

There was a short silence.

"I don't know how you feel," Fujishima muttered. This seemed to soothe Tohru's rage to simmering rather than boiling over.

"Right. You don't know. So don't tell me what to do!"

"I wasn't telling you what to do. I was making a suggestion. I just think it would be a good idea. You can say goodbye and cut the ties properly. But in the end, it's your decision."

Using the crutch, Tohru stood up. His lack of proper freedom enraged him even more now. Fujishima stood up. It irritated Tohru to see him stand up so easily. He would have liked to throttle Fujishima, but his ankle wasn't going to let him make any fast movements. Instead, Tohru pushed Fujishima. He didn't do it with much force, but it was enough to send Fujishima to the floor.

"If you don't want to get hurt, I suggest you shut up!"

Fujishima looked terrified. That irritated Tohru too.

"You shouldn't exert yourself." Fujishima said, his voice quivering.

"This is nothing! Wait until I'm well, you'll see what exertion looks like!" Tohru screamed.

Tohru took his crutch and slapped Fujishima's ass with it. Fujishima cried out in pain but Tohru did it not twice, but three times. He was going to teach Fujishima pain. That way, Fujishima wouldn't try and argue with him again. On the fourth hit, when Tohru raised the crutch, Fujishima moved out of the way. Tohru reached out to stop him from escaping but lost his balance. He stepped on his right foot to stop himself from falling. His knee gave out with the pain and, with a yelp, Tohru crashed to the floor.

"Are you okay?"

Fujishima ran to Tohru and tried to help him up. He seemed to have forgotten that only seconds ago Tohru had been beating him! Tohru felt shy suddenly, as if his body temperature was rising.

"Get the hell off me!" Tohru yelled, and Fujishima backed off.

"I didn't mean to make you mad. I was just telling you what I think you should do. If you really don't want to see them, why don't you call or write a letter instead. How you tell them doesn't matter. What matters are the people who looked after you for so long."

Tohru pulled the crutch back to him and heaved himself up. He left the living room, put on his shoes and left. He hated that apartment. He hated that man. When Tohru lashed out, people either got mad or got scared. Yet Fujishima was always kind to Tohru no matter what he did.

Tohru left the apartment building and turned right. Although a crutch wasn't very unusual, all the people that passed Tohru turned to stare. When Tohru turned the second corner, he looked around. He made sure that the apartment block was still in sight. He had nowhere to go and no money after all... Tohru felt miserable. He sighed. It was very cold and he only had a shirt to keep him warm. He should have stayed in the apartment, he thought to himself.

He stared at the entrance to a park that was lit by street lamps. He realized that he was staring at nothing, but that made him angry. He had no expectations. No faith or trust. Wasn't that what Fujishima had taught Tohru? If you had expectations or faith in people, you'd get hurt. If you didn't have any expectations, there could be no hurt and disappointment.

If only he wasn't injured... If only he had a little money... He could have shown Fujishima true pain. He



could then go someplace where no one knew him. Tohru sat down on a bench. He tried to lean his crutch on the bench but it fell to the ground. In anger Tohru kicked it a good couple of meters away. There was no way he was going to be able to retrieve it now.

He looked around to see if someone could pick it up for him. From the direction of the street lights he could see a shadow coming towards him. It was a man wearing a long black coat. When Tohru realized who it was, he was relieved. He didn't want Fujishima to know that though, so he didn't look up to greet the man. Instead, he stared at his shoes.

"If you stay out here too long, you'll catch a cold," Fujishima said. He picked up the crutch and placed it gently on the bench. "Let's go home."

Fujishima looked concerned. Tohru bit down on his top lip. He didn't want to hear 'go home.' But he couldn't say that he didn't want to 'go home.' After a while, Fujishima stood up, but he didn't encourage Tohru to come back with him anymore.

Tohru was on his own. It was getting a lot colder. He thrust his hands into his pockets and his fingers touched something hard. When he took it out, he discovered that it was a key on a chain. Tohru gripped it tightly. The sudden rush of blood to his clenched hand warmed his fingers slightly. He got up from the bench.

It had been about an hour since he'd fled the apartment. He turned the key in the door and without calling out to Fujishima, he went to his room. Inside it was warm.

Tohru collapsed onto the bed and held his head

in his hands. He didn't know what to do anymore. He didn't know what he should do. He was angry. It was a senseless anger. If he was honest with himself, all he wanted to do was cry.

In the end, Tohru didn't go to the hotel restaurant. He didn't write a letter or call either. He did consider calling, but then he didn't want it to look like he was doing what Fujishima had told him to.

Just as Fujishima had said, Tohru found personal documents with his name on them, like his passport, in the chest of drawers. He also found his bank account records. His statements indicated that he had 220,000 yen in the bank. This seemed like a lot for a man of twenty-eight. He had a monthly salary of 200,000, of which around half was being transferred to someone named Satoko Kinoshita. There seemed to be a few thousand yen going to Tohru's living costs. The rest was going into savings. Tohru wanted to know where 100,000 yen of his money was going each month. He wondered if Fujishima would know who this person was. But in the end, Tohru didn't ask. As long as Fujishima hadn't gotten his money, Tohru didn't care.

Tohru also found two keys. He didn't know what they were for. There was nothing in his room that required a key. He then realized they were bike chain keys. That he rode a bike was another surprise to him. He'd never thought of himself as the sort who would ride a bike. It didn't seem to him that Fujishima rode a bike, so Tohru

concluded that it must be for his.

There was a bike key, but no car keys. He did find a well-used wallet with a drugstore card inside, but no driver's license. Tohru wondered if he'd lost it somewhere, then wondered if he'd already applied for a new one. Perhaps he kept his license in Fujishima's car. Tohru couldn't imagine he and Fujishima sharing a car.

After suddenly losing six years, time went by slowly now. Tohru didn't like going out using the crutch, and apart from trips to the doctor and to buy cigarettes, he didn't leave the apartment. After lunch his stomach would start to grumble. He would eat what Fujishima had left for him and then watch some TV. All the shows were different now, though. He didn't recognize any of the popular songs or artists. Everything was unfamiliar but he slowly started to get used to it.

Fujishima worked from Monday to Friday. He left at 8:30 a.m. and came home at 6:00 p.m. One day someone called from a paper manufacturer asking if "Department Head" Fujishima was at home. Tohru told the caller that Fujishima was at work and hung up. Tohru had assumed Fujishima was still in the indigo dye industry, so he was surprised to find out he was now working in paper manufacturing. Perhaps the family business had gone bust. That thought made Tohru smile.

Tohru never saw anyone in the morning or afternoon, but in the evenings he ate with Fujishima. Fujishima would bring food and they would sit opposite each other while they ate, but they exchanged very few words. Every now and then Fujishima would comment on something, but Tohru wouldn't reply so the conversation

would be over before it could start.

Three weeks passed. The swelling and pain in his right ankle receded. If he walked far or tried to run, it would hurt again, but he didn't need the crutch to leave the house. Now that he was mobile, Tohru started to feel bored.

When Fujishima saw that Tohru could move around more, he said, "This is old, but you can use it if you want."

Fujishima handed Tohru a paper bag. He opened the bag, curious at what it might be. In the bag was a single lens camera. He was thrilled. The paper bag was old, but the camera inside looked brand new. In the camera box was an insurance guarantee but it had long expired.

Why had Fujishima given him a camera? Did Fujishima know that Tohru liked photography or was it just a coincidence? It wasn't the same camera he had looked after so carefully in his previous life, but he couldn't find that one in his room. Tohru wondered if Fujishima knew where that one was, but he didn't ask. This camera he'd been given was old, but just having a camera in his hands again filled him with delight.

In the next few days, Tohru left the apartment for something other than cigarettes. Once Tohru had a camera, the world was transformed. He was looking for good photos.

While he was walking down the street, Tohru suddenly remembered something that his teacher had told him about photography.

"Anything can be a photograph. Even a small

stone on the street. As long as you like it, it will have meaning. You will reveal something. Those photos are always the best."

Tohru first became interested in photography at a school festival. He had thought that the festival was a total waste of time and cut class to get away from it all. He had spent the day on the school roof listening to the festivities below.

It was gone four o'clock and people had started to clean the debris away. Tohru had come down from the roof and was walking down the hall. He stopped at one of the displays. It was a montage of photos, but one caught his eye in particular.

It was titled 'Family.' It was a photo of four stones of similar size placed on a dining table. The photo had a real impact on Tohru. He suddenly felt a little jealous. But for once he didn't feel angry. The four stones together, evenly spaced... they worked. They looked like they should be together.

The photo was part of a project by the photography club. They had used the theme of stones and created a whole collage of pictures. Tohru was impressed and decided to join up. He wanted to take photos like that one. Tohru wouldn't work with the other club members though. He only went to the meetings when he wanted to use the darkroom.

Tohru's work paid off when he entered a magazine competition. He took a photo of a withered flower and titled it 'Dead End.' He won a prize for it. He remembered how happy that had made him. It was much more than the worth of the photo; it made *him* feel worthy. It was true happiness.

He went out one day with a purpose in mind. Although Tohru's right ankle was better, he was still limping. The sun was shining but the breeze was still bitterly cold.

He slowly walked through the park, then past a convenience store, entering onto the main street. He was looking for a bank where he could withdraw some money. He wasn't in any hurry, though. He turned the corner and started walking down an old shopping street. He found a bank and asked to withdraw 20,000 yen. He had a cash card, but he didn't remember the PIN number so he couldn't use it.

He left the bank and then started to look for a shop where he could get some film for his camera. He enjoyed walking down this older shopping street. Every now and then there was a new shop, but it would seem out of place.

"Tohru-chan!"

Tohru heard a voice calling his name as he walked past a fishmonger. He turned to see an elderly woman in an apron waving to him. He looked around; there was no one else. She could only be calling to him. She grinned.

Tohru wasn't going to be able to ignore her. He walked towards the store. The woman slapped Tohru on the back in a familiar manner.

"Long time, no see. We thought you'd moved or something. Have you been ill?"

If he didn't say anything and let her talk, maybe she would say something to reveal who she was. When he said nothing, the woman sighed and asked him to wait. She went back into her store and then came out

with a plastic carrier bag. She handed Tohru a plastic bag with two fish wrapped in newspaper inside.

Tohru had no idea how to cook fish.

"Thank you," he muttered, and accepted the bag.

"Try and sound a little happier. It's free this time. A thank you to our best customer."

Tohru grimaced and left the shop. She must have known who he was during the six years he had amnesia. It sounded like he'd been close to her. He was surprised that he'd been so friendly with other people. It didn't seem like him.

He was relieved that he had escaped that situation. However, it seemed it was out of the frying pan and into the fire, because outside the butcher shop a middle-aged woman called him inside. He was forced to fake his way through a whole fifteen minutes of conversation in which he barely understood what she was saying. She gave him two vegetable croquettes.

It kept happening! The grocer got him to take a cabbage and the tea seller got him to taste some tea. Tohru started to feel tired though. He realized that he must have visited these shops often when he had amnesia. Everywhere he went, people seemed to be calling his name.

Next to the shops was a train station and to the right of that was a book store. Tohru wanted to go home, but he also wanted to see if they had any photography magazines. The bookstore was large and spread over two floors. He wandered the store, not sure where the photography magazines would be. He met the gaze of a middle-aged man wearing the store uniform. This man

also called out "Tohru-kun" to him. He had a pleasant and welcoming smile.

"The book you ordered came in. I phoned you at home but I got the answering machine. It's at the cash register on the first floor. Make sure you pick it up."

Clearly this was another store that Tohru used to frequent. Everywhere seemed to be tainted by the old Tohru.

"Thanks, I will," Tohru assured the man.

"Oh! And thank you for the cake you baked for my daughter's birthday. It was so delicious. My daughter complained that I ate too much of it. Did you include alcohol in the recipe?"

Tohru swallowed. Apparently he really had made cakes. He didn't remember any of this so he couldn't answer. While Tohru stood silent, the store worker got called away by another staff member. Tohru wanted to flee. Fujishima had told Tohru that while he had been suffering amnesia, he had made cakes. However, it hadn't seemed real to him.

Tohru managed to get away in these confusing conversations by letting the other person talk and muttering noises of agreement where necessary. Finally, he managed to make his excuses and headed down to the counter with a hastily chosen photography magazine.

At the counter was a middle-aged man. Tohru didn't know what sort of book he had ordered, but if he didn't pick it up now, they were bound to call the apartment.

"Takahisa, is it? Let me find your book..."

With a hardcover book on the history of baking

with alcohol added to his magazine, the price was six times what Tohru had wanted to spend just on a photography magazine.

Tohru left the store and took the long way home. When he got home, he thrust the food he purchased carelessly into the freezer. He was hungry so he gobbled up the croquettes. He didn't bother warming them up but they were delicious. While he ate, he took the baking book from the bag, leaving the photography magazine. The book was in color and full of bright photographs of candy and cakes, each with a description alongside. Tohru didn't bother to look any further and discarded the book on his bed.

Tohru didn't look at the photography magazine either, though. Instead he sprawled out on the sofa. He had felt regret at losing six years of his life, but he hadn't given much thought to how he had spent those six years. Even if he couldn't remember it, he had been living here, shopping here, baking cakes here. Tohru needed to reassess himself. He could hardly believe that he had been ordering books on baking.

Tohru stood up from the sofa. He wanted something warm to drink and went to the kitchen. As he waited for the water to boil, he noticed that all around the sink were different pieces of cooking equipment. He'd never even seen some of these objects, let alone know how they were used. He'd never seen Fujishima cook. Even when he had the day off, he bought bento boxes. The only conclusion was that he had been the one cooking. If he could make candy and cakes, then he must be able to cook. Tohru couldn't even remember holding a kitchen

knife. He'd lived in the dorms in middle school and high school. Later when he lived on his own, he always got ready-made food like Fujishima or ate at restaurants.

His mind couldn't remember, but he wanted to see if his body did. Tohru wanted to see if something might come back to him. He took the fish from the fridge and placed it on the kitchen counter. He then picked up the knife. He wanted to try cutting the fish, but he didn't know how. He swung the knife up, and then down onto the fish. The fish head sliced cleanly off and dropped into the sink... It didn't feel like his body knew what to do and it didn't bring back any memories lurking in his mind. The kettle squealed that it was boiling, and Tohru tossed the knife into the sink.

After drinking some coffee, he hid the fish remains in the trashcan so they wouldn't be seen and went back to his room. He looked at the bookshelf that represented his self in the forgotten six years. There were lots of books on baking. In fact, that was all there was. Some were even written in English. Wondering if he really had read these books, he reached out to take one from the shelf. Opening the cover, he saw that the margins of the pages were covered in notes.

Tohru then looked through his drawers and closet. He found leaflets on bakery trade exhibitions, ticket stubs for hot springs and theme parks, and a good collection of travel guides. Tohru discovered a new side to this other self – a self that wanted to travel all over the world. There were lots of notebooks too. Inside were scribbled names of shops where he'd bought candy and the types of candy. These passionate scribbles were certainly his

handwriting but Tohru had absolutely no recollection of penning these words. It felt weird, and a little scary.

As Tohru flicked through the notebooks, something fell to the floor. It was a Polaroid of Fujishima. It looked like it was summer when the picture had been taken as Fujishima was in short sleeves. Fujishima looked so happy. Looking at the picture made Tohru realize he'd forgotten to pick up film for the camera.

That evening at the dinner table, Fujishima asked him, "Did you buy the food in the fridge?" Tohru couldn't be bothered to explain the story, so he said nothing.

Fujishima didn't touch the food and it stayed in the fridge. Within a week it was rotten.

The Tohru he had been for six years seemed like a stranger; a Tohru who was polite, well-liked, good at making cakes, and a frequent traveler. Tohru wanted to know a little more about this other self. He didn't want to ask Fujishima, though. But he couldn't think of any other way. He had no choice.

"I want to meet some people from when I had amnesia," he said one day. Fujishima was delighted and made the arrangements.

A few days later, Tohru found himself standing at the west exit of a station three stops down from where the apartment was. This station was close to the main shopping center. Fujishima had only told him the name of the man he was going to meet – Kusuda. Tohru wasn't even going to recognize this man. It made him feel very

uneasy. Just past seven, about ten minutes late, the man arrived. Tohru knew it was him from the way he stared in his direction. Apparently, during the six years of his amnesia, he had been close to this man. Tohru had imagined that if they were good friends, Kusuda would be a little rough round the edges. But this man was wearing a smart grey suit under a black coat. Not quite what Tohru had envisioned.

Kusuda greeted him with a bright smile.

"I heard that your memories came back. I guess it was always going to come back suddenly. Big surprise for all of us."

Kusuda laughed and slapped him on the shoulder. Tohru felt tense. Kusuda had longish hair and small eyes. He looked about the same age as Tohru. He was a little shorter, though.

"Let's get some dinner. Where should we eat? Hmm... How about Ginnan?"

Kusuda didn't give Tohru a chance to answer and just started striding off. Tohru was a bit taken aback by this man's confidence. He hurried after him until Kusuda entered a place just three minutes from the station. It was a rundown bar.

"Oh! Kusu-chan, Tohru-chan! You haven't been in here for a while," the elderly man behind the bar greeted them. It sounded like this was a regular haunt for the old Tohru.

Kusuda said, "The usual to drink with some yakitori and onigiri."

Tohru wanted to see what the 'usual' was. It turned out to be Japanese tea...

"Here's to your memories returning!"

Tohru realized that this was the first time anyone had expressed happiness that he was himself again. Kusuda must have been hungry, because as soon as the cook brought the yakitori out, he reached out for it straight away.

"Fujishima-san said that when your memories came back, you lost all your memories of when you had the amnesia. Is that true?"

"Umm, yeah..." Tohru sipped on the tea, but it wasn't refreshing enough. Kusuda had a beer. Tohru craved a beer.

"Do you mind if I get a beer?" Tohru asked.

Kusuda's eyes widened with surprise. "You drink?"

Tohru couldn't even sleep without a drink. Obviously, Kusuda's Tohru didn't drink. The owner poured a beer for him. Tohru took a sip and felt the bubbles slip down his throat. It was just what he needed. Kusuda stared at him in fascination.

"Is something wrong?" Tohru asked.

Kusuda shook his head and mumbled no.

"Am I different from how I used to be?"

"Yeah," Kusuda responded. "But the main thing is that we're together. You're not a different person. You just seem more shy."

Tohru took his pack of cigarettes from his shirt pocket and lit one. Kusuda stared at him with that surprised expression again.

"What?" Tohru asked.

"It's just that the old you didn't smoke. It's just a

surprise."

Tohru grunted and took a drag. He'd started smoking when he was eighteen and had been a heavy smoker from day one. He had no intention of quitting. It was a surprise that the old him hadn't smoked.

"The old you hated smoking. You said it ruined the smell of a cake baking. Fujishima-san doesn't smoke either."

"Oh..." Tohru quickly emptied his beer glass and ordered another one.

"I heard that you quit your job at the restaurant. What do you do now?" Kusuda asked.

"Not much..." Tohru blew a puff of smoke out.

"Are you taking photos?"

This question surprised Tohru. How did Kusuda know about his passion for photography? Kusuda grinned as if he'd just hit the bulls-eye.

"I thought you might like photography. When you had amnesia you didn't have any interest in photography. Fujishima-san said that before the accident you loved photography. He tried to get you to go to photography school and bought you a camera, but you just got mad at him."

This was the first time Tohru had heard that Fujishima tried to get him to take up photography. He was surprised that he had no interest in his hobby during those lost years. Before the accident he had so badly wanted to be a professional. It felt weird that one accident could make him totally forget his ambitions.

Tohru had been quiet for a while. Kusuda slapped him on the shoulder and broke the silence.

"Don't linger on what you were like before. That was then. This is now. I'll say this, though, when you had the amnesia you had your... problems, but I think you were happy."

Hearing Kusuda tell him that he'd been happy filled Tohru with a strange feeling. Tohru couldn't remember a time in his life where he would have called himself 'happy.' When he had lived with his stepmother, he had always been alone. And in the end he had been totally abandoned. His stepbrother was a pervert and his stepmother abused him. In middle school he'd been bullied. At least the bullying had stopped in high school, but he hadn't been any less lonely.

"I don't think you should worry too much about the past. You can't step into another man's shoes. But I still hope we can be friends."

Kusuda did a good job of keeping the tone light but getting his point across. Tohru felt comfortable. He liked this guy. He'd never had someone like this in his life before. Kusuda wasn't pushy. Tohru felt like he could talk to him as an equal. He had always wanted a friend like this. However, now he had the chance of having one, he wasn't sure how to act.

His ideal friend had suddenly appeared. But this man had been friends with the Tohru who had amnesia. How had that Tohru made friends with Kusuda? What had they talked about?

Tohru tensed up. The shadow of a man he couldn't remember always seemed to be lurking close behind as he tried to make his way in this new world. Tohru desperately wanted to understand the person he'd been



for six years. He seemed so different.

"Is there anything you want to ask me? You don't have to feel embarrassed," Kusuda grinned.

Tohru looked back at Kusuda. Kusuda wasn't smiling at the Tohru he knew before. He was smiling at the Tohru sitting with him now. Tohru decided that he had to put the past behind him and move forward. Kusuda said himself that the important thing was that they were here together. Why couldn't the real Tohru make friends with Kusuda again? Kusuda was evidently willing to try.

The silence continued. Tohru racked his brains for something to say. He was supposed to be Kusuda's friend, but he knew nothing about him. What could Tohru find to talk about? He lit a cigarette to stall for time. To be honest, he wanted to go home. This man seemed to be a good guy and he'd told Tohru lots of things.

Tohru looked around the bar so he didn't have to look at Kusuda. He noticed a flyer advertising a beer. A girl in front of an impossibly blue sea was enjoying a beer. It made Tohru recall the ticket stubs he had found in his drawer. He then remembered the things he had seen in the trashcan on the morning he had woken up from his amnesia...

"Did I have a girlfriend?"

Kusuda, who had been smiling up until now, suddenly turned very serious. "Do you mean a lover?"

"Lover, friends with benefits, whatever."

For someone who only minutes ago had said Tohru could ask him anything, he was a bit slow in replying.

"Fujishima-san hasn't said anything to you?"

Kusuda finally answered.

Why was this man's name coming up again?

"No. We don't speak much."

"Why?" Kusuda asked. He seemed confused at Tohru's answer.

"We just don't talk much. I hate him anyway. He's disgusting. I don't understand how I ended up living with him. I understand it less now my memories are back. I would move out if I had the money. I just have to be realistic right now."

"I see," Kusuda said. He was fidgeting and his voice was a complete contrast to minutes earlier.

"You did have a lover when you had the amnesia."

Tohru grunted. Why shouldn't he have been dating? His reason for dating was sex anyway so it didn't matter who it was. A girl who would do it when he wanted it. He hated it when girls asked to hang out with him and he wasn't in the mood. Most of the girls he had slept with seemed to think he cared for them. This had made him roar with laughter. He only had relationships in bed. He didn't care for anyone. Tohru thought it hysterical that women could mistake that for love.

Tomorrow would mark the third week that he had his memories back. He had been at the apartment the whole time, but not one girl had contacted him. Whether she'd known about his memories returning or not, she should have tried to call once at least. Or maybe they weren't dating like that...

"It was just a friends with benefits thing, right?"

Kusuda showed a complicated expression on his

face. He seemed to be trying to get out of something.

"You were serious about the relationship."

Tohru felt sorry for the girl. The person she'd been dating was totally different from him. The real Tohru was not mild-mannered or good company. Perhaps she had thought the two of them had a future together.

"You'd been dating for a while and you were always together."

Those words reverberated in Tohru's skull. He started to fidget himself. He wondered how it felt to be dating one girl for such a long time. They wouldn't have only been connected physically, but emotionally too. What did he talk about with her? How did they spend their time?

"Does she know about the amnesia going away and I've forgotten about the last six years?"

"Yes."

"Does she want to see me?"

"Do you want to meet up?"

Tohru wasn't expecting a question to answer his question.

"Well... I'm interested to know more..."

"If it's just curiosity, then I think it would be better that you don't meet up." Kusuda was suddenly cold. Maybe because he'd said no, Tohru wanted to see who it was even more.

"I could see her from far away. I just want to know what she looks like."

Tohru hadn't expected the conversation to get so serious. He expected that Kusuda would at least agree with him on this point. However, Kusuda wasn't going

to concede this either.

"Think about it objectively. You've forgotten your lover, but you want to see this lover again." Kusuda looked intently at Tohru. "You don't remember anything about your lover. You were someone else back then. There's no point in dwelling on it."

"There must be some similarities between who I was with amnesia and now. Maybe if we met and chatted, we'd start dating again."

Kusuda looked troubled.

"It is you, but you're different. You're not the same person you were in those six years. You should be who you are now and choose who you fall in love with."

Tohru understood what he was saying. He understood, but it wasn't enough.

"OK. I don't care about her, but I wonder how she feels. How can she just cut her ties with me if our relationship really was that serious?"

Kusuda squinted.

"Your lover always knew that your memories might come back and you would forget your time together."

Tohru felt angered that this person he had cared for, even if it wasn't strictly him, could just abandon her feelings for him. It sounded like it was easy for her to forget him and move on. Tohru thought she must be a very cruel, self-centered woman.

"Your lover is a good person."

Tohru downed the rest of his beer. He didn't remember her, but he felt an emotional pain for the thing he had lost. He needed to know more. He wondered who the girl he'd slept with while he had the amnesia was

like...

The empty plate, which had held their snacks, was taken away and fish was brought to the table. Kusuda had ordered it. He pushed the plate towards Tohru to get him to eat some. Tohru felt wretched. He reached out as if filling his stomach with something might satisfy the craving for knowledge. The fish was delicious. Tohru imagined that this was what those rotten fish in the fridge could have been if he hadn't neglected them.

Tohru wondered why he'd just been given the food for free. But considering he had been a good cook the way they remembered him, perhaps it wasn't a surprise. He wondered why there was nothing left in his head from those six years. If... If he met his girlfriend, she would know him but he wouldn't know her. What would she expect? Meeting would be too scary. Maybe Kusuda was right and it would be best to not meet up. After all, Tohru couldn't bake cakes, he couldn't cook...

The topic didn't come back to his lover, and Tohru didn't bring it up again. Instead, Kusuda told him an interesting story about how they had met at a convenience store. They laughed and the tension cooled. But in Tohru's heart, he still wanted to know about his girlfriend. Maybe there was another line of conversation he could use to find out what he wanted.

"Do you know who Satoko Kinoshita is?" Tohru asked. He wanted to know who the woman was that he had been transferring large sums of money to every month. He thought that it might be his girlfriend.

"Where did you get that name?" Kusuda asked. His reaction seemed genuine.

If that wasn't Tohru's girlfriend, who was she?

Tohru ordered his third beer. Kusuda was starting to slur his words.

"Be nice to Fujishima," Kusuda spluttered. "He's a good man. Make friends with him."

Tohru squinted and just let Kusuda carry on. Kusuda was too drunk to be argued with.

"He's so kind. Really... Very nice." Kusuda started to mutter and then lowered his head. Tohru was left to his own thoughts. In his drunken haze he thought of Fujishima. He wondered why Fujishima had looked after him when he'd lost his memories.

When Tohru had found out he wasn't his father's real child, he'd left home. He never thought he'd hear from a member of the Fujishima family again. But no matter where Tohru went, Fujishima had tracked him down. He'd said that he wanted to support Tohru. Before Tohru had left home, he assumed he had rights to any future inheritance. However, as soon as he found out that they weren't related by blood, he forgot all about that. In fact, he didn't care about the inheritance. Money wasn't what Tohru had ever wanted. His fake father had never showed a glimmer of emotion or a shred of kindness. Tohru didn't want the money. It wouldn't replace having a father.

Tohru was depressed. Just seeing Fujishima's face made him angry. Nothing had to be said and Tohru beat him. However, this man had taken him in and looked after him. He'd done this for six years. It must have cost Fujishima a lot of money and he'd had no thanks...

Tohru shook his head and tapped his forehead. He

knew that Fujishima was kind and had been kind to him. But all of this creeped him out. Why would someone who he beat expend so much time and effort looking after him?

Tohru couldn't trust his feelings. If he trusted someone, he would get betrayed. Tohru didn't want to get hurt. That's why he didn't have deep conversations. He didn't want anything to matter. He didn't want to hear friendly words.

Tohru left the bar sometime after ten o'clock. Kusuda was very drunk and stumbled to one side and the other across the street. Tohru had to help keep him upright. Suddenly Kusuda gasped, and pushed Tohru over to a brightly-lit shop window. On the other side of the glass were colorful cakes.

"Let's buy a cake! Cake! Cake!" Kusuda cried and tugged on Tohru's sleeve.

"I don't eat sweet things."

"I know that," Kusuda said, and forced Tohru into the store. It was a cute store. Kusuda ordered two strawberry shortcakes with cream. When it came to paying, Kusuda told Tohru to pay. Tohru grumbled about being forced to pay for something that he didn't even like, but he still paid for the shortcakes and took the boxes.

"Who's going to eat this," Tohru complained.

"This is a present for Fujishima-san," Kusuda said. "Every time you went to Ginnan, you'd bring this back for him."

"I'd take something sweet back for him?"

"Cake. A cake."

Kusuda patted Tohru on the back. They parted at the station and Tohru went back to the apartment on the train. He was a little tired. By the time he got home it was past eleven o'clock. He turned the key in the door. When he entered the hallway, the lights were on. Glancing into the living room, Tohru saw Fujishima. Fujishima was in pajamas tucked up on the sofa. There was a hardcover book on his knees. He must have been reading.

"I'm home."

There was no reply. Tohru felt thirsty. It must be because of the beer. He went straight to the kitchen, and drank some water from the faucet.

"Did you talk to Kusuda-kun?"

Tohru nodded and wiped the water from his mouth with the back of his hand. "It was really easy talking to him."

Tohru glanced down at the box he'd brought in that contained the cake. He didn't want to say it was for him and make a song and dance about it. He wished that he'd thrown it away on the way back. Tohru decided to leave the box on the table in front of the sofa. Fujishima looked shocked for a moment, and then smiled.

"Thank you."

Fujishima smiled. Not just any smile, though; a genuine smile. A smile that caught Tohru off-guard.

"Don't thank me. Thank Kusuda. He got it," Tohru half-lied. He wanted to get out of this room because he was starting to feel awkward. He retreated to his bedroom. But as soon as he was in the room, he needed the restroom. Trying to step as quietly as possible, he walked down the hallway. The lights were still on in

the hallway. As he passed the living room, he glanced in. Fujishima was sitting on the sofa eating the cake. Fujishima was older than thirty, but he looked like a child. Tohru could see how much he was enjoying it.

Tohru was captivated by the scene. He couldn't move from where he was standing for at least a minute.

Tohru wanted to start attending photography school in April. There was a school only two stations from the apartment building and he had already submitted his application. He didn't want to delay his career by one more day.

His savings only covered the entrance fees. Tohru would have to take a part-time job to pay for the rest of the school fees.

Tohru found a well-paying night shift job at a factory at the end of February. He would have preferred to work in delivery or removals so he could work during the day, but he needed a driver's license for that so he had to compromise. He left for work at eight o'clock in the evening and wouldn't get home until after seven o'clock in the morning. Fujishima worked during the day so Tohru didn't see much of him. However, they still ate their evening meal together. They sat eating the bento boxes Fujishima brought home. They didn't speak. Tohru's ankle was better and he was making money, so he didn't need Fujishima to look after him financially anymore. However, Fujishima never said anything about it so Tohru didn't either.

Tohru took his bike to work. At first his body wasn't used to night shifts and he was always tired. The only things he seemed to have time for were work and sleep, but as he got used to his new schedule, he started to show more interest in his environment. He especially liked the way the sun looked early in the morning. It gave new meaning to the world and the old, rundown buildings he passed.

Tohru started taking his camera with him when he went to work. When he saw something, he stopped his bike and took a photo. He had no money but each day he would use several rolls of camera film. He didn't have a darkroom, so he got his pictures developed at a cheap place nearby. He got frustrated when he felt that the results didn't match his vision.

He wanted to see different scenery, so he changed his route to work. His new route took him past a bakery. It wasn't open, but when he passed by he thought the cakes must be delicious. He thought that Fujishima would be very happy if he took a cake home. Fujishima liked sweet things. Even if he had passed by when it was open, he didn't have a reason to buy one for Fujishima so he wouldn't.

The days passed with regularity. Finally the bitterly cold winter winds were gone and before Tohru knew it, it was the middle of March. Tohru finished his shift, took his bag and glanced out the window of the factory. The sky had been threatening to rain but Tohru thought he could make it home before it started. However, it started pouring. He hadn't brought an umbrella and he hated getting his camera wet. He decided to stay in the staff

room and take a nap first. He woke up to the sounds of footsteps and voices. He looked at the clock. It was almost twelve o'clock. The day shift would be stopping for lunch. Tohru checked the weather. It was cloudy, but it had stopped raining.

Tohru grabbed his bike. On the way home, he kept stopping so he could take pictures of the landscape after the rain. Suddenly another shower started. Tohru thought it might be okay, but then it really started to pour.

Tohru thrust the camera into his bag and jumped under the shelter of a bakery's awning that was nearby. He'd always passed by it, but had never been around when it was open. He had often looked in the shop window in curiosity at the bright cakes for sale. A delicious smell oozed from the shop. Tohru gazed in amazement. The door opened, and a lady appeared beckoning him in. Tohru couldn't just stand outside the shop buying nothing. He was about to get on his bike, when the lady called out to him.

"Tohru-chan."

Tohru had found himself in situations where he met people from his previous life. He didn't want to explain what had happened. However, he didn't like pretending to know them and the conversations were always awkward. It made him feel as if he didn't have a place here.

"It's been a while."

A lot of people that had known him for those six years didn't know that he had lost those memories now. Tohru didn't want to explain all about how he had amnesia, but when his memories came back, he didn't

remember any of those six years. That was why Tohru would make pleasant conversation with the people he clearly used to know and then made his excuses. Afterwards, he wouldn't go back so he could avoid meeting that person again.

The woman invited Tohru into the shop and showed him to a corner table inside the store. He didn't want to, but to refuse would be even more difficult.

"We've not had many customers today because of the rain," she said, placing a cup of coffee in front of Tohru. She sat opposite him and clutched her own coffee cup with both hands.

"I can imagine," Tohru said politely. However, the woman opposite Tohru gave off a very different vibe than all the other old acquaintances he'd met up until now. He didn't know how to act... But there was definitely something comfortable about this.

"How is it going at the hotel? Last I heard you were preparing a cake recipe for your scholarship exam."

Tohru hesitated. He didn't know anything about this.

"Umm..."

The woman seemed to panic.

"I'm sorry..."

She must have made a mistake. Tohru looked around. The woman seemed to notice.

"He had to go to the hospital today. It's a hernia. The doctors say he shouldn't stand up for so long at work, but he always ignores them."

Who was she talking about...

"He's missed you since you quit your job. He

doesn't have any children, so he looked on you as if you were our own son. We were so happy when you said you would work here when you graduated, but we all knew that you would go much further than some small town bakery."

He couldn't quite fathom all this information. It seemed to raise more questions than it answered.

"I know you must be busy, but please come by more often. He'd really like to see you."

Tohru replied that he would, even while knowing that he didn't intend to return here again.

"I know this might sound weird, but if you want your own bakery in the future, you know you always have this place."

Tohru looked at her. She was serious.

"I know that it isn't much, but it wouldn't take a lot of money to fix the place up. Don't worry if you're not interested. But the offer is there," the woman smiled. "You know, he's always working on some new cake recipes. He says he wants to be better than you. It's funny."

This woman wasn't talking about him. She was talking about the other Tohru. He knew he should tell her, but he didn't have the courage to tell her that he had forgotten it all, even how to bake cakes.

At some point the rain stopped. Tohru got up to leave and the woman gave him a cake. She smiled and told Tohru to say hello to Fujishima for her.

On his way home he pushed the bike so he didn't ruin the cake. As he walked, he replayed his meeting with the woman over and over in his head. If his memories

had never come back, he would have spent the rest of his life baking cakes.

Kusuda had said that he should just enjoy being the person he was now. He was probably right. The other Tohru hadn't remembered being abandoned or betrayed. Their outlooks on life were totally different.

If he died tomorrow, not one person would mourn him. He didn't know where his real mother was anymore. He had no one he was close to. But if the person he had been those six years died, there would be lots of people who would mourn him. That lady he just met, Kusuda, all the store owners he knew...

He gripped the bicycle handles tightly and sucked the air in. Tohru had decided long ago to never settle down. But regardless of that, the other him had apparently easily settled here. They should be the same person, but they were very different. The Tohru with amnesia was the imposter. The Tohru he was now was the real one. But the imposter seemed to have had more fun and been happier. He had been loved.

The imposter had more worth as a person. This thought upset Tohru. The wind was cold where he was standing on the bridge. Tohru shivered. He stared down at the water below. His feet seemed heavier when he started walking again. He kept thinking about throwing the cake away, along the way, but he couldn't.

He got home sometime past three o'clock. He put the cake in the fridge, and then headed for the shower. Afterwards, he didn't go to his bedroom. Instead he sat on the sofa in the living room and wrapped himself up in the blanket. He didn't turn on the TV. He sat in silence.

Despite the calm surroundings, he couldn't relax.

At seven o'clock, Fujishima arrived home as usual. After eating the bento boxes, Tohrû didn't lock himself in his room as usual, but sat on the sofa. After clearing up, Fujishima left the room, but he came back after he'd changed his clothes and asked Tohrû if he'd like a coffee. Tohrû didn't want anything to drink, and usually he ignored Fujishima, but this time he nodded. Fujishima brought a warm cup of coffee to the table. Tohrû picked it up and took a sip. He realized that Fujishima had made it. He felt that this was something the old him had used. That thought made Tohrû not want to drink anymore, and he placed the mug back on the table. The taste of coffee reminded Tohrû of the woman he had met earlier today.

"There's a cake in the fridge. Have it."

Fujishima looked like he didn't know what to do for a moment and hesitated, and then he smiled, thanking Tohrû.

"I didn't buy it. It was raining on the way home and I took shelter at a bakery. The lady gave it to me. Apparently I used to work there."

Tohrû just wanted Fujishima to know that he hadn't gotten it for him especially. Tohrû covered his head with the blanket.

"You must mean the owner of Port."

Tohrû didn't answer. Instead he turned on the TV and let the noise drown out his thoughts. He started to nod off.

"Tohrû."

Tohrû heard his name being called but he didn't

react. He was lost in his own world.

"Tohrû?"

Fujishima gently shook Tohrû's shoulder and it made him jump. Fujishima also jumped back.

"Sorry. I didn't mean to surprise you, but shouldn't you be going to work..."

The clock said 7:45. Tohrû sighed.

"I'm taking the day off," Tohrû said, and pulled the blanket over his head again.

"Do you feel sick?"

"I think I might have a cold..." Tohrû's voice stuttered a little with the lie.

"Do you want some medicine?"

"No."

Tohrû knew that he didn't have a temperature. If he wasn't careful, Fujishima would find out and he would have more questions to answer.

"Just leave me alone!" Tohrû yelled, and turned the TV up even louder. Tohrû hadn't wanted to shout at Fujishima, but aggression was the only way Tohrû knew how to handle people.

"If you're not well, you should rest in your room."

Tohrû didn't want to be on his own. That was why he had come to the living room in the first place. Fujishima didn't understand him. But then how could Fujishima understand his feelings. Tohrû stood up, threw the blanket at Fujishima and went to his room. He jumped into his bed and covered himself with the sheets. He was so angry that he couldn't sleep. He wished that he had just gone to work. He didn't have enough money

for his school fees and materials as it was.

After he had spent thirty minutes in his room, there was a knocking at the door. Tohru decided to ignore it. He didn't reply but he could hear the door open. Tohru uncovered his face a little, but kept his eyes closed to pretend he was sleeping. He could hear footsteps approaching. He could hear Fujishima's breath getting closer. Then, he was right beside Tohru. Fujishima didn't say anything.

Tohru could feel Fujishima's fingers on his forehead. They then lifted off his skin. Tohru could hear a deep sigh. He reasoned that Fujishima was checking if he had a temperature or not. However, Fujishima didn't leave the room. Instead he stayed by Tohru's side. That made Tohru feel happy, but he then wondered what Fujishima was doing. Slowly Tohru opened his eyes. Tohru gasped a little when he saw that Fujishima was closer than he anticipated. Fujishima was clearly surprised too.

"Sorry. I should have warned you I was here," Fujishima said.

Fujishima had jumped back from the bed when he realized that Tohru wasn't sleeping. Tohru, instead of getting angry, closed his eyes. The silence continued. Nothing was said and Fujishima didn't leave.

"The cake was delicious. Thank you," Fujishima finally broke the silence.

"Someone else gave it to me. I told you," Tohru replied, eyes still closed.

"It must have been hard getting it home safely on your bike."



Tohru suddenly opened his eyes. Fujishima had been thinking about this.

"You saw?"

"No... But I know you work far away."

The conversation died. If the silence continued, maybe Fujishima would leave the room. Tohru didn't like that idea, so he searched for something else to say.

"What's so good about cakes?"

"They're delicious. Especially strawberry shortcake... Do you want to try it?"

Tohru didn't want to try the cake, but he answered that he did. Fujishima excitedly left the room and, to Tohru's regret, he returned with a tray holding a piece of cake. Fujishima placed the tray on Tohru's bedside table and picked up the plate. He used a fork to cut a small chunk of the strawberry cake and offered it to Tohru. Tohru might not have been feeling very well, but there was no way at twenty-eight he was going to allow himself to be fed like a small child.

"Tohru?"

Tohru swallowed his pride and slowly opened his mouth. The fork carrying the cake came closer until the taste hit his mouth. The cream was super sweet on his tongue. It made his chest hurt a little.

"It's sweet."

"Of course, it's cake," Fujishima replied. Tohru felt a little bit of an idiot. Tohru threw the sheet back over his head.

"It's too sweet. I don't want anymore," Tohru sulked.

Fujishima laughed, and smiled. Tohru pulled the

sheets further over his head. The sweet taste on his tongue and the embarrassment he felt mixed in his head.

Tohru felt that he had paid for the price of his lie.

In April Tohru started photography school. The money he'd made at his part-time job combined with his savings still wasn't enough to cover the school. Fujishima suggested that Tohru borrow some money from him. When Fujishima first made the suggestion, Tohru totally rejected the idea. He didn't want to borrow money from that man.

However, when he started school, he couldn't make his budget stretch to cover lesson fees and materials. Tohru took up a part-time job, but his outgoings were still greater than his incomings.

In the end, Tohru had no choice if he wanted to continue. He justified it to himself by reasoning that he was already a lot older than his classmates and he had lost a lot of time on starting his chosen career. He could postpone his education for another year to save up some more money, but he didn't want to delay it anymore.

He borrowed as little as possible from Fujishima. Monday to Friday he went to school. After school he worked from seven to one at a bar. He worked during the day on Saturdays and Sundays too. Tohru's days were exhausting, but at least he was going to school to learn the thing that he really loved.

Because he had so much work to do, he didn't have a chance to eat with Fujishima anymore. In fact,

they rarely saw each other. But Tohru always knew that someone was there. When he came back from his job at the bar, the light in the hall and the living room were always on. After Tohru had taken a shower, only the hall light would be on. Still, it felt comfortable.

When Tohru had first taken the job, he'd been very worried that he might lose his cool and start a fight with a customer. It was true that he'd met some awkward customers and he'd gotten mad, but he hadn't lashed out and hit anyone. He'd managed to stop himself. He told himself that if he lost this job, he wouldn't have enough for school and he wouldn't be able to pay back Fujishima's money. That mantra calmed him and he managed to continue serving the wretched drunks who came to the bar.

Tohru felt that he was much calmer in general. He was much more relaxed than he had been when his memories came back and before the accident. He'd started to think that the six-year break hadn't been so much of a bad thing. Now he had someone in his life. They didn't speak much, but Tohru didn't feel so alone. He knew that if he needed Fujishima, Fujishima would help him.

One Sunday in April Tohru took his camera and bike, and went to the park. There were lots of clouds in the sky that day so the shadows weren't as defined as usual.

Tohru chained his bike to the bike railings near the children's playground. Walking around the park, he found some beautiful hydrangeas near the lake. They would be the perfect subject, Tohru thought. He set his

tripod up on the path while interested passersby watched. Tohru set the lens he wanted and adjusted the camera until it was just how he wanted it.

There wasn't much sun so his photos wouldn't have the color that he usually preferred. However, this was the perfect season for these flowers, and in a way Tohru liked the way this lighting gave his photos a lonely feel to them. He took photo after photo, changing the distance and the angle. Before he knew it, he had used up a whole roll of film.

While he was changing his film, he felt he was being watched. He turned around to see two big eyes looking up at him. It was a small girl of about three or four, and even Tohru had to admit that she was cute.

Tohru quickly turned his camera around, hoping for that one in a million shot. However, his sharp movement had obviously startled the girl, as she scurried off as fast as her little legs would carry her.

Tohru was good at taking still life photos, such as buildings and flowers. He wasn't good at people. His teacher had told him that his portraits lacked life. Tohru agreed, but he had no interest in people. He only took photos of people when the school made it part of an assignment.

Tohru started to look around for another subject, but it began raining. He quickly packed his camera away and dove under a nearby shelter. The rain was really pounding down. He was soon joined in the shelter by other people who had also been caught out. He then noticed that the little girl he had frightened earlier was there too. She was holding the hand of a man who Tohru

assumed was her father. When the girl saw Tohru looking at her, she shyly hid behind her father. Tohru sat on the edge of a bench and stared out at the rain.

"Takahisa-kun..."

Tohru spun round when he heard his name. It was the father of the little girl.

"I thought it was you. It's been a long time," he said. It wasn't one of his friends from school and it wasn't one of the regulars at the bar. Tohru didn't recognize the face. It must have been one of the acquaintances of his old life. He'd been bumping into fewer of them lately, but it could only be expected that there would be more.

"Hi..." Tohru nodded. This man looked over forty. He looked proud but kind.

"You look well."

Tohru smiled, and nodded again. He wanted this conversation to be as short as possible.

"I was surprised when I got your letter of resignation from your friend."

Resignation... This must be a friend from when Tohru worked at the restaurant.

"I was angry at first, but assumed you must have had your reasons. You wouldn't have just quit without saying a word otherwise."

He didn't know that Tohru had amnesia. He glanced out at the rain and silently cursed. If it wasn't raining he could have made his excuses and left. However, Tohru wasn't prepared to risk his camera in the rain.

"Was someone in the kitchen giving you problems? Was someone jealous? It was just before you were to go study in France."

He remembered what the woman at the bakery had said. He must have passed the exam to study abroad. Tohru realized he must have been good at what he did. But it was someone else who did those things...

"I had personal reasons for quitting..." Tohru tried to end this conversation. But it seemed the man wasn't going to give up that easily...

"Did you get hired by another restaurant perhaps?"

"It really was just my problem. I don't make cakes anymore."

The man looked astonished at this revelation.

"Why did you stop? You can't stop! With your talent you should be aiming high! It's not too late. If you want to come back, I'll talk to the boss. Or, if you don't want to work at your old place, I can introduce you to some other restaurants."

The man was so serious and so passionate as he spoke, it increased Tohru's confusion. But it didn't matter what this man said to convince Tohru, nothing could change the fact that Tohru had forgotten how to bake cakes. He knew that for those six years he'd been a genius cake maker. He knew that... but he didn't want it to be said. He didn't want to hear what this man was saying. He couldn't take this anymore. He couldn't take this shadow over him.

"I said that I don't bake cakes anymore."

The man seemed taken aback by the force in Tohru's voice. The rain was getting worse. Tohru couldn't stand this anymore, though. He clutched his camera to his chest and was getting ready to run out.

"And your partner?" Tohru just heard it over the sound of the pouring rain. "Your partner loves cakes. I hope you're still making cakes for our number one customer."

He was talking about the other Tohru's girlfriend. Tohru had been told it would be best not to meet her. So he didn't know who she was. He had no idea what she even looked like.

"You live together, right? Are you going to get married?"

Tohru didn't answer this question and the man didn't say anything more. If he'd been living with a woman, he couldn't have been living with Fujishima the whole six years. It also meant that if Tohru had been living with her, they must have been very close. Why had she ignored him as soon as he regained his memories? She must not want to know the real him.

Who could blame her? Everyone liked the other Tohru best. Why would she want to know the bad Tohru?

The rain stopped. The man and the child had left. Tohru remained sitting on the bench, staring out at the turbid waters of the lake.

For the six years he'd been suffering amnesia, he'd been living with his girlfriend. That meant he couldn't have been living with Fujishima the whole time. Fujishima must know about the girl.

Tohru left the park at some time past five o'clock.

The apartment was dark when he returned. Tohru assumed that Fujishima must be out, so he was surprised to see Fujishima in the living room. He was lying on the sofa in a jeans and T-shirt, sleeping. On his chest lay a photo album.

The window was wide open and a warm wind was blowing in. Fujishima moved in his sleep and the photos slipped from his chest and onto the floor.

This made enough noise to wake Fujishima. He opened his eyes and saw Tohru.

"You're back," Fujishima smiled.

"There's something I wanted to ask you," Tohru said.

Fujishima wiped his sleepy eyes and sat up to listen to Tohru's question.

"When I had the amnesia, I was dating a girl. What do you know about her?" Tohru could see that Fujishima tensed up immediately but he wasn't prepared to drop this. "I want to know more about her."

"What do you plan to do if you find out?"

Tohru thought this was an odd question. It was his girlfriend. Surely he could do what he liked? If he wanted to see her, he could. He at least wanted to say something about her chucking him as soon as he got his memories back.

"I just want to know more. I used to live with her, right?"

"Who-Who told you this?" Fujishima's face had gone white. He sounded flustered.

"Does it matter who? I don't want to get her back. I just want to know what she's like."

Fujishima brought his hands to his lap and clutched them tightly together. His fingers were shaking.

"I don't know. I really don't know anything," Fujishima's voice quivered. He was clearly avoiding looking at Tohru.

"Even if you never saw her, you must have talked to me about her."

"Sorry," Fujishima muttered. He then stood up and started to pick up the photos that were scattered on the floor. Tohru watched as Fujishima left the room. He sensed that Fujishima was hiding something from him. Tohru followed Fujishima out of the room.

"I must have said something to you," Tohru demanded to know. He grabbed Fujishima's right arm before he could escape to his own room. Fujishima stared at his arm. He looked genuinely terrified.

"You don't want to know," Fujishima said. This time Tohru could hear truth.

"I'll make that choice. Not you."

Fujishima shook his head violently. Tohru started to get angry at Fujishima's lack of compliance.

"It's not going to hurt me. I don't even remember her!"

Tohru didn't understand why everyone clammed up when he broached this subject. If he didn't mind, why should anyone else? Perhaps this female had been particularly cruel. After all, this was the woman who had abandoned him as soon as he was well again. Perhaps Fujishima and Kusuda were trying to protect him.

"Tell me. Come on..."

Fujishima shook his arm free.

"It's not necessary."

Tohru was starting to see red. How dare Fujishima deny him this! Everyone he met who had known the other Tohru only wanted to talk to him. They all loved the other Tohru. It hurt Tohru now to know he couldn't be that person. All their kind words did nothing but make him feel wretched.

Fujishima wouldn't talk, though. Perhaps they hadn't been close when he had the amnesia. Tohru liked that idea. He could see Fujishima hadn't changed at all since they were children.

The memories of the childhood betrayal were still in his heart. He hadn't forgiven that. He didn't trust anyone. But he was dependent on Fujishima. Fujishima had paid for Tohru to live. He had lent Tohru money for his school fees. Tohru thought that he could rely on Fujishima for any kind of support he needed. He never expected this reaction.

"Just tell me."

Fujishima looked white now. He bolted past Tohru to his bedroom. Tohru tried to run after Fujishima, but he was too late. The bedroom door was closed. No matter how much Tohru banged on it, Fujishima was not going to open it.

"Don't run away from me!" Tohru yelled, but no matter how many times he knocked on the door, it was no use. It would have been easy for Tohru to knock down the door, but he didn't.

Tohru went to his own room and slumped down on the bed. He wondered why Fujishima wouldn't tell him. Tohru didn't care if the woman had been cruel to

him. He just wanted to know what she was like. It would satisfy his curiosity. That's all he needed.

He didn't know anything on his own. Fujishima wouldn't tell him anything. Tohru then realized what he had to do. There was someone else who knew about the girl he was dating. Tohru grabbed his wallet and his keys and ran out of the apartment.

After their first meeting, Tohru had been meeting up with Kusuda occasionally. Kusuda would phone him and invite him for dinner. He had been to his apartment several times so he knew where it was.

When Tohru knocked on Kusuda's door, he was eating his dinner. As soon as the door opened, Tohru didn't give him a chance to say a thing.

"I want to know about the girl I was dating," Tohru blurted out.

"I'll tell you. No need to be so hasty," Kusuda assured Tohru. He welcomed Tohru in. Tohru sat on the sofa and the other man offered him some beer. As soon as Tohru took a sip, he realized how thirsty he was. He drank the first glass quickly, and Kusuda poured him another.

"What's earned me this pleasure suddenly? Why do you want to know about your lover? Did something happen between you and Fujishima?"

Kusuda slurped some of his ramen. Tohru had finished off half of his second beer.

"He knows about her. But he won't tell me. I kept

asking but he went into his bedroom." Tohru's head hurt. "I want to know something about her. Why won't he tell me? It's nothing to do with him anyway! You must know something about her. Tell me what she's like!"

"Well... Look, wait a minute..." Kusuda got up, taking his ramen cup with him, and returned with some more beer.

"I told you that you should worry about who you are now. Why this now?"

Tohru drained his second beer.

"It's just..."

"Has something happened?"

Tohru stared at the pattern on the rug. Why did he want to know? He'd forgotten what happened, but there was something niggling inside.

"I met someone that I had worked with at the restaurant. He said that my girlfriend liked cakes..."

"Ah..." Kusuda replied.

"He asked if we'd gotten married and said we'd been living together. I must have been close to her."

Kusuda pushed a third beer in front of Tohru as soon as he finished his second. Tohru clutched the beer can with both hands.

"Was she good to me?"

"Yeah."

"Was she pretty?"

Kusuda seemed to think for a while and then shrugged.

"How old?"

Kusuda shook his head. "I'm not sure how old. Older than you. Maybe four or five years."

An older woman. Tohru closed his eyes. He imagined being in the embrace of warm, soft arms. It was a sweet fantasy.

"But why didn't she want me when my memories returned? She hasn't tried to contact me. She just turned her back on the real me!"

"I don't think you've been abandoned... In the end neither of you did anything wrong. It's exactly because you had a good relationship that you should leave it."

Despite what Kusuda was telling Tohru, if she really loved him, then why wasn't she with him now that he had his memories back? She should be here even if he couldn't make cakes anymore and even if he wasn't loved by everyone anymore...

"I get that. But she could have at least given me some respect and met me."

"You two have already met," Kusuda said. His tone was calm, but it hit Tohru like a bullet to the brain. Kusuda was watching Tohru's reactions carefully. "You've met, but you probably don't remember."

Tohru started to search his memory bank for anything. When and where could they have met? Maybe when he was shopping? Maybe when he was at the station? At work? At school? How could he have not known!

"I told you last time. If you were meant to be, you'll fall in love again. Isn't that enough? You should leave it."

Tohru had no words. What was there to say? Maybe she couldn't cope with the fact that he had met her but not recognized her. Maybe she'd taken it as proof

his feelings for her weren't very deep.

"Here, drink," Kusuda prompted, breaking the silence. Tohru felt desperately miserable. He drank the beer as if it were water. The more he drank, the worse he felt. He was close to tears and he was forcing himself to choke them back.

"Anyway, how's the study going? Still not good at people yet?" Kusuda was trying to change the subject to Tohru's photography. Tohru didn't want to answer questions about photography, though. All the people in his class were young. There was a ten year difference between Tohru and many of his fellow students. It made him feel about the years he'd lost.

Tohru remembered something that he had been told about his other self.

"I was really good at baking cakes, right?"

"Why are you asking me that all of a sudden?"

"That person I met... He really praised me. He said that I was going to study in France. I can't quite believe it."

There was a short silence.

"It's true. You were going to go to France. Your lover was going to join you. We talked about your passport application."

Tohru was starting to feel that recovering from amnesia had done him more harm than good. He was going to photography school now and he had no idea whether he had the talent to make it work. Whereas this other Tohru did have talent. People liked him and he had a lover. What did he have now? Tohru didn't want to admit that he was jealous, but he was.

"Crap," Tohru muttered. He held his head in his hands. He wanted to go somewhere. He wanted to run away. He wanted to go someplace where no one knew him. He wanted to escape the ghosts of the past. Tohru polished off another can.

Kusuda asked him if he was okay, but Tohru ignored him and started another can. Then he started another, and another, until he was so drunk he was practically paralytic.

"The last train will be going soon..."

When Tohru finally staggered up, it was already eleven o'clock.

"You're drunk. You can't go back in this state. Anyway, it's raining. Stay here tonight," Kusuda said.

Tohru nodded. His head hurt and his heart hurt. To top it all off, his stomach wasn't feeling too good anymore either.

"Did you tell Fujishima that you were coming over to see me?"

Tohru didn't answer. He could barely keep his eyes open.

"Call him. He'll be worried about you. He was so anxious on that day you got your memories back. Fujishima-san was running around everywhere trying to find you."

Tohru heard Kusuda sigh. He then felt the cold plastic of a phone being pushed against his ear. Kusuda removed his hand and Tohru managed to grab it before it fell to the floor. He could almost imagine the phone in the apartment ringing as he waited for Fujishima to pick up.

"Hello."

Tohru heard the voice of the man he lived with. He didn't say anything.

"Is that Kusuda-kun?" Fujishima said when no one answered. Tohru clutched the phone with both hands and closed his eyes.

"Tohru..." Fujishima said his name so softly, so kindly. Tohru opened his eyes again.

"It's me..."

"Are you with Kusuda-kun?"

"Yes."

They were both silent. Tohru couldn't hang up. Tohru wondered why he was afraid that Fujishima might hang up the phone.

"Are you drunk?"

"Not really."

"Do you want me to come and meet you?"

Fujishima would pick him up no matter how late it was and no matter that it was raining cats and dogs. That made Tohru feel happy. It meant he had a place he could call home. He wanted to go home, but it wouldn't be a wise move considering his current state of inebriation.

"It's okay. Kusuda said I could stay here tonight."

"Okay."

Tohru didn't want to hang up, but he didn't want to say something else.

"Umm..."

"What is it?"

"I'm sorry for earlier. I shouldn't have got mad at you."

Apologizing felt embarrassing for Tohru. He hung

up the phone before Fujishima had a chance to answer. His fingers were trembling. It was the alcohol, he told himself.

The next morning Tohru waited until Fujishima had gone to work before returning to the apartment. He didn't want Fujishima to see him. Tohru took a shower and headed out to school and didn't return until after five o'clock, his usual time.

Tohru wondered what he should say to Fujishima when he got back for the whole day. It wasn't that he had to say anything but if Fujishima didn't say anything... Sitting on the sofa, Tohru recalled his childhood. How he had been taken into the Fujishima household and the time he had spent playing with Fujishima. He wondered what they spoke about then. He knew they talked a lot, but he couldn't remember what about now. It didn't matter what Tohru said, Fujishima was a perfect listener. Tohru could remember that much.

Suddenly the door bell rang. Tohru panicked for a moment, thinking that it was Fujishima, but then he realized people didn't ring the doorbell to their own home. Tohru ran to the door. It was a package for Fujishima. It looked like something to do with his job. He needed to stamp the forms with Fujishima's name stamp.

Tohru went into Fujishima's room. The room was neat and tidy. The only furniture was a desk with a computer on it, a bookcase and a bed. Tohru glanced over the desk – nothing. However, when he opened

the drawer, he spotted the name stamp right away. Tohru returned to the delivery man and completed the paperwork for the delivery. Once that was done, Tohru returned to Fujishima's room.

Fujishima's room was so neat; it had the quality of a hotel room. The only thing that made it personal was the bookcase. Standing neatly on the bookcase were lots of brightly colored books. Lots of them were photo albums, some old and some new. There were some albums with the same spines. They looked just like the albums Tohru used to have. He felt sad.

Tohru was a little surprised that Fujishima was so evidently interested in photography. But then again, Tohru had seen him looking through photographs plenty of times in the living room. Fujishima had also given him that old, yet pristine, camera. Perhaps he had wanted to take some photos himself with it. Tohru felt a sudden wave of happiness that Fujishima and he shared something in common. Tohru wondered when Fujishima would come home – he hoped that it would be soon. He wanted to ask Fujishima what sort of photos he liked. He realized that he was clutching the name stamp still. He opened his hand and saw his hand was covered with the red ink. He smiled.

When Tohru tried to return to the stamp to where he had found it, he couldn't open the drawer. It had opened easily before, but now it was stuck. He yanked it and with the sound of something ripping it came open. Tohru realized what had been stopping the drawer from opening – a pocket photo album had gotten stuck in the drawer mechanism. The album was now screwed up and

ripped in places.

"Oops..."

Tohru cursed himself for his clumsiness. He wondered if he could fix it with some sticky tape. He picked up the album and opened it out of curiosity. But curiosity soon turned to shock. These were photos of him.

The photos were dated August, four years ago. These were from the time when Tohru had the amnesia. It was weird to see someone in the photos who looked like him but wasn't him. It was a little scary and he flicked through the pages with some hesitation. It looked like him and Fujishima had gone camping at some point. Fujishima looked relaxed with an almost child-like smile.

The album Tohru was looking at came from a large pile of photos. Tohru picked up each album one by one. They were all photos of the two of them, just with different scenery. Mountains, a theme park, a restaurant. Tohru realized how close the two of them must have been. He was then overwhelmed by another feeling; a feeling of seeing something yet untold. It was strange that there were so many photos of just the two of them going to so many different places.

Tohru noticed in the back of one album, there was an envelope pushed into the sleeve. It wasn't sealed. Tohru, forgetting that this was not his room and not his things, pulled out one of the contents of the envelope. More photos. As soon as he saw the contents of one particular set of photos, his mind went blank.

The photos showed him and Fujishima in a naked



embrace. Tohru couldn't find an explanation for the photos. His fingers started to twitch and the envelope fell to the floor. More photos came tumbling out as the envelope fell. All of them showing the same theme.

All of the photos were Polaroids and all of them were him and Fujishima embracing, naked. Tohru couldn't stand to look at them and bent down to collect them up. However, he was too scared to touch them and pulled away.

Who was the man in these photos? Who was this man kissing and hugging Fujishima naked? It couldn't be him. There was no way he would do anything like that.

Tohru fled Fujishima's room and retreated to his own bedroom. He leaned against the door and closed his eyes. No matter how tightly he closed them, he couldn't wipe the memories away. He remembered back to when he was little and Fujishima had tried to touch him. But even that was just enough to send a shiver down Tohru's spine.

Fujishima must have said something to him when he lost his memories. He would have pretended to be kind and gentle, but he had deceived Tohru when he had no way of defending himself! He'd been tricked! That was the only explanation!

Fujishima had deceived Tohru and forced himself on Tohru.

Tohru recalled what Kusuda and his old boss had said. They had spoken of a lover who liked cake. Tohru now understood that he had been living with his lover. Finally the inconsistencies had an explanation. Tohru

threw back his head and started to laugh. Kusuda had been right all along. How could anyone tell Tohru that while he had amnesia he'd been sleeping with men? But not just any man, Fujishima of all men! That was who he had been, though. Now he had been living here with nothing suspect happening like that.

Tohru looked up at the ceiling of his dreary room. When his memories had come back, he had felt lonely. He felt the world had discarded him and he had been very angry. When Fujishima had come to collect him, he'd been happy. He had enjoyed kindness. He could forgive the past. He had trusted Fujishima again.

Tohru had been wrong to forgive and forget. Fujishima was the worst sort of man. He had deceived someone who had no memories. He had been played by Fujishima. He had obviously decided to try and act like it had never happened when Tohru's memories returned. Fujishima would have known how Tohru would react if he knew.

Tohru clenched his hands tightly. He really couldn't trust anyone. Putting trust in someone only laid yourself wide open to being deceived. That was just how people were. That was all Tohru had ever known. How could he have let himself forget?

At just past seven-thirty, Tohru heard the sound of the door opening. Tohru stepped out into the hall to see Fujishima taking his shoes off. Fujishima glanced up at Tohru's expression and then down at his wristwatch.

"Sorry I'm late. I had a lot of work today. I brought dinner..."

Tohru didn't give Fujishima a chance to finish. He grabbed Fujishima's wrist and pushed him into his bedroom.

"What's the matter?" Fujishima asked, panicked. Tohru ignored him and instead pushed him to the bed. The bento boxes burst out of the bag and fell onto the floor.

"What the hell did you do to me?" Tohru's voice was low and calculated.

"What do you mean?" Fujishima wouldn't look Tohru in the eye.

"I'm asking what you did to me when I had the amnesia."

Fujishima's eyes were wide now. His lips were quivering.

"...You remembered?" Fujishima was barely audible.

"I saw the photos in your room. The Polaroids..." Tohru snorted.

Fujishima's face went white. He looked as if he were about to burst into tears. Fujishima lowered his head and muttered, "Let me explain."

"I saw enough."

Tohru brought his knee up to hit Fujishima squarely in the nose. A spray of blood covered the floor. Fujishima held his hand to his face, but he couldn't stop the blood seeping from between the cracks in his fingers. Tohru didn't care. He kicked Fujishima again. He kicked his head, his chest. Each thud resonated in the

sparse room. Tohru felt nothing. To him it was the same as kicking a stuffed toy. He didn't once feel like he was hitting another human being. He had forgotten what it felt like to beat another person. It had been so long...

Why didn't Fujishima apologize? Why didn't he say he was sorry as he crawled about on the floor? If he just apologized, Tohru was sure he would calm down. He had expected an apology. He expected Fujishima to burst into tears, admit the whole sordid state of affairs and beg for Tohru's forgiveness.

As he relentlessly hit Fujishima, something in his chest hurt. Before Fujishima had betrayed him, he had been a happy child. Everything in his life had been sweet before he learned to despair. Now Tohru knew that there was nothing in this life he could trust. This was the result of trusting someone. Fujishima had only ever brought pain, despair and suffering into Tohru's life. How could Tohru have forgotten this?

With each kick, Fujishima moved a little less until finally he stopped writhing. He was so small and weak. How could such a useless man be the source of so much pain? How could this happen again? Tohru's childhood memories came flooding back. The beating he had endured from Fujishima's mother. It had happened because he had rejected Fujishima's advances. He had rejected Fujishima's perverted intentions, so Fujishima had rejected him. Fujishima had clearly not forgotten his lusts and had taken advantage of Tohru when he was ill.

All the bad things were his fault. The thought of what they must have done together made Tohru want to vomit... Tohru looked around the desk until he found

what he was looking for. His hands clutched the cold metal.

Tohru approached Fujishima. He loosened Fujishima's belt and pulled down his slacks. Tohru kicked Fujishima round, and between his white thighs was the repulsive tool.

Tohru grabbed it, and was surprised at the reaction it gave him. He took his hands away. The way it grew made it look alive. He slowly opened the scissors. Cutting it off was the only way to stem the evil. Just as Tohru was about to snap the scissors shut, Fujishima's clammy body twitched.

"Aaaah!"

An ear-piercing scream filled the room. The scissors had just missed Fujishima's organ. Tohru was about to attempt the operation again, but Fujishima was holding both of his hands between his legs and had curled up into a ball. Tohru couldn't find his target. Enraged that Fujishima was putting up resistance, he slashed at Fujishima's pale ass. The scissors were cheap so the blade didn't go very deep, but Tohru just kept hacking at his white flesh to make up for it. Fujishima just lay there, protecting his manhood and sobbing.

When Tohru finally stopped and examined his handiwork, Fujishima's face was covered in blood and every sob came out like a wheeze.

He hated that sound so he slapped Fujishima until he was quiet.

Apparently more crimes are committed in summer. Tohru had read that in a book somewhere. He thought it made sense. The summer heat warmed people's tempers, pushing them closer to boiling point.

Recently he hadn't wanted to drink. He didn't have any money. He also didn't want his studies to be affected by a hangover. However, the sounds of Fujishima's footsteps in the hall meant that he couldn't sleep at night. The less he slept, the worse the insomnia got. He had to drink...

The first drink started a chain reaction that Tohru couldn't stop. After a hangover he couldn't be bothered to go to class, so he didn't go. Ditching class made Tohru feel even worse about his life.

Soon it was vacation. Tohru lost track of the days of the week when he didn't have class. He should have got a job to make some more money, but he really didn't want to work. Instead, he stayed in the apartment drinking during the day. He left for his bar job before Fujishima got home. When he returned in the evening, he drank even more.

On that day, Tohru had risen at midday. He didn't know what day it was and had to check the calendar on his desk. Saturday... It was Saturday so Fujishima would be home. Tohru sighed. He didn't care. Even when he was home, he rarely left his room so Tohru hardly ever saw him. Tohru knew best why he wouldn't leave his room.

Tohru used the bathroom and was just about to return to his bedroom when he heard a door in the hallway open. Fujishima was just coming back in. He must have left. As soon as Fujishima saw Tohru, he lowered his

head. On the right side of his face was a yellow bruise. Last time Tohru had seen it, it had been a purple color. Fujishima was wearing long sleeves despite the heat.

"I brought lunch," Fujishima said, and offered a convenience store bag with one shaking hand. That was all it took for Tohru to feel the rage boiling up inside again. He knocked the bag out of Fujishima's hand. Fujishima instinctively covered his face with both hands. Tohru stopped himself.

"Not my face," Fujishima's voice was so quiet. It sounded like a hissing snake to Tohru. "Everyone has been asking me what happened. I had to tell the people at work I'd fallen down the stairs, but I can't keep that lie going for long..."

Tohru yanked the arm covering Fujishima's face away. He looked briefly at the yellow bruise that was lingering on his cheek, judging its location and then cleanly slapped him. He wasn't going to be told by Fujishima where he could or could not hit him. His hand stung now though, so he decided to not hit Fujishima again and let him go. Fujishima doubled over, his hand clutched to his mouth. Between Fujishima's fingers drops of red formed. It looked like he was crying. Tohru kicked the quivering man. Fujishima tumbled into the entrance hall.

The weather was unbearably hot. A drop of sweat from his forehead rolled down to his chin. Tohru looked down at the man on the floor. He could feel a never-ending source of anger flowing inside him.

In disgust, he turned away and retreated to his room. He was too apathetic about life to even be bothered

to beat this wretched creature tonight.

Tohru started drinking in the evening. By nine o'clock there were over ten empty beer cans discarded in his room. He had no snacks and no drinking partner. It wasn't like him to drink this much on his own. The tips of his fingers were starting to feel cold. Perhaps the air conditioning temperature was set too low. He got up to set the temperature higher. However, when he tried to take a step he stumbled backwards into the book shelf. Tohru yelped and kicked out at the books that were scattered across the floor. The pain in his foot enraged him.

Sprawled out on the floor, Tohru looked up at the ceiling. Looking at the white ceiling made Tohru feel like there was some sort of pressure on him. He wasn't happy. How could he be happy? But what should he be doing? He didn't know. All he could do was kick out his anxieties with all his might.

Knock knock.

Tohru heard a knocking at the door. He twitched but didn't answer. After a few moments, a voice came from behind the door.

"I know you're in there."

"Go away," Tohru shouted back.

"I'm not going to open the door. I just want to talk like this."

Tohru lifted himself up.

"What do you want to do now?" Fujishima asked. His voice was low and quiet. "If you can't stand to see me, it's going to make living together hard. Tell me what you want to do."

Ever since Tohru had found out about what had

been happening during those six years, he'd beaten Fujishima every time he'd seen him. Just seeing Fujishima walk past had enraged him. Hearing him speak made Tohru see red. Fujishima now never went into the kitchen or the living room. He locked himself in his room. Yet Fujishima hadn't forgotten to buy Tohru some food every day.

Fujishima obviously wanted the beatings to stop and that's why he was saying this. Tohru snorted. As soon as Tohru had become a problem, Fujishima wanted him out. Fujishima made Tohru feel sick. All Tohru had wanted was to make Fujishima feel the same pain he had.

"What is it that's important to you?" Tohru called out to the man on the other side of the wall. There was silence. "I'm asking you what!"

Tohru kicked at the door. Tohru wanted to destroy everything that Fujishima cared about.

"You're what's important to me."

"How many times did we do it?"

Just as Tohru expected, there was no answer to that question.

"I'm asking you how many times you tricked me in those six years! If you don't answer I'll kill you!"

"...I don't know..." Fujishima answered, his voice faltering. Tohru snorted. He forced open the door. Fujishima was standing in the doorway in his pajamas. On seeing Tohru his body started to quake. Tohru grabbed him and pulled him into his room. He was about to kick him, but he lost his balance and fell to the ground.

He found himself lying next to Fujishima. Tohru

glared at Fujishima. No matter how much Tohru kicked and hit, he couldn't get his feelings across. He couldn't release the depression or the rage. He wasn't a child anymore. He was taller than Fujishima. He was stronger than Fujishima. He could kill Fujishima if he wanted. But that wouldn't inflict the psychological trauma that Tohru wanted Fujishima to feel. He had to hit his betrayer or he would never be able to move on.

Tohru stood up and bent over Fujishima. He grabbed at Fujishima's hair.

"Suck me."

Tohru wasn't afraid of Fujishima or what he had done to him.

"Suck me. Just like you used to!"

Fujishima looked at Tohru's crotch.

"Will that satisfy you?" Fujishima's lips quivered as he spoke.

"Don't ask questions."

Tohru grabbed Fujishima's head and pushed it into his crotch. Fujishima struggled.

"Just do what I say."

Two tears formed in Fujishima's eyes. Even this made Tohru angry and he slapped Fujishima. Fujishima was Tohru's toy now.

"Please don't hit me anymore," Fujishima whispered.

Fujishima slowly undid the zip on Tohru's pants. He pulled out Tohru's sex organ and licked it. The tip of Fujishima's tongue flicked on Tohru's muscle. Fujishima reminded him of a cat lapping milk. It wasn't enough.

"Open your mouth wider."

Fujishima closed his mouth. He prepared himself and then buried his face deep into Tohru's thighs. As soon as Tohru felt his member in Fujishima's warm mouth, a wave of pleasure overcame him. All his feelings of fear and anger gave way to a feeling of comfort.

Tohru laughed as he heard Fujishima's lips slurp on his hard cock. Being sucked off by a man was no big deal. Tohru had won. He had triumphed over his fears. Tohru came in Fujishima's mouth safe in the knowledge of his victory.

After the rain lifted, the evening air was humid and stuffy. Tohru had argued with a customer at the bar. The bar had had to postpone the fireworks scheduled for that night because of the rain. A customer started causing a fuss about it. He was upsetting the other customers, but Tohru shouldn't have hit him. Tohru didn't just hit the customer, though. He really let him have it. The owner managed to sort it out, but had screamed at Tohru to get out of there.

It was only nine o'clock when Tohru cycled home. Rage and disgust oozed out of his sweaty pores. He chastised himself as he waited at the traffic lights. His thoughts were interrupted by the sound of a bell. He couldn't hear where it was coming from. It rang again.

The light turned green. There were too many people crossing for him to cycle. He got off and pushed his bike, and passed a child dressed in a yukata. In the child's hand was a goldfish in a plastic bag. The fireworks

had been postponed, but it seemed the fair stalls had still set up for business. In the past, Tohru hadn't gone to fairs. He had a vague memory of carrying goldfish in a bag like that child...

When he got back to the apartment, he immediately went to his room and threw himself onto the bed. He thought angrily of the customer he'd fought with. He went to the kitchen looking for a beer, but there wasn't a single can. He'd forgot that he drank the last one yesterday. Tohru slammed the fridge door and kicked it.

Tohru went to Fujishima's room and opened the door without knocking first. There was a lump under the sheet in the bed. He must be sleeping, Tohru thought.

"Get up!" Tohru yelled.

However, Fujishima didn't get up. Tohru yanked the sheet off the bed to find Fujishima shivering.

"Not now, please," Fujishima begged. His face and ears were bright red. "I don't feel well. I might vomit."

"Whatever."

Fujishima moved his head to the side.

"You're only hurting yourself."

Tohru grabbed his hair and slapped him. When he slapped Fujishima again, his face got even redder.

"Please... no more..." Fujishima begged meekly. Tohru stopped. A drop of blood from his nose fell onto Tohru's fingers. Fujishima started to cough. It was a deep hacking cough.

"Do it with your hand," Tohru ordered.

Fujishima didn't complain. Tohru sat down on the bed and Fujishima shuffled over. He released the fastenings on Tohru's jeans and pulled it out. Fujishima

grasped it with his right hand and started to furiously pull at it. Tohru watched as his penis grew, and turned a dark red. He started to pant.

He had made Fujishima suck him many times since that first night. He got home around two o'clock in the morning, but he would still make Fujishima do it to him. If anything displeased Tohru, he would hit Fujishima. If Fujishima didn't swallow all of Tohru's semen, he made him lick it off the floor. Coming in Fujishima's mouth felt far better than when he masturbated. He liked it because he was making Fujishima do it. It wasn't that Tohru wanted to humiliate Fujishima. Rather, he wanted to make himself feel better. It felt like payback for his youth.

Tohru felt Fujishima's fingers wrap around his penis. Tohru prepared himself for the pleasure. He enjoyed Fujishima's submission to his wishes. However, this time it wasn't making the anger go away. He could still feel the fires of rage burning inside him.

He kicked, hit and abused Fujishima for one reason: to satisfy something inside. He wondered why he did it. Perhaps there was just something bad inside of him. Perhaps it was the other Tohru finding an outlet. Perhaps it was simply revenge for the exploitation Tohru had had to suffer.

Just before Tohru was about to come, he hit Fujishima's hand aside. The warm feeling that had been creeping through his body was gone instantly.

"Put it inside you."

"...Not in my mouth. I can't," Fujishima's voice was rasping.

"Put it in your ass." Fujishima's slim body shook when Tohru spoke. "If you can't use your mouth, find another place to put it. Take your pants off."

Fujishima looked up. He shook his head, his face one of total incomprehension.

"Please, please leave me."

"What's the problem? You always used to do it. You did it to me. Get your pants off! Otherwise, I'll beat you so hard you won't be able to go to work tomorrow. Quickly!"

Fujishima stood up, a bit unsteady, and came closer. Tohru grinned to see Fujishima naked from the waist down.

"Use a condom."

Fujishima reached under the bed and took out some condoms. He covered Tohru's manhood with it. He was so obedient and skilled. He reminded Tohru of a female prostitute. Fujishima made one last desperate plea.

"Are you sure you want to do this?"

"Just shut up and get on with it."

Fujishima lay down on the bed, face up. With a sharp kick, Tohru pushed him so that he was face down.

"Wha..."

"I don't want to see your face. I'll lose my hard on."

Fujishima got himself into position and slowly lowered his hips. It was tighter than Tohru had expected. Tohru bit his lip and pushed. Slowly his manhood disappeared into Fujishima's body. Fujishima was sitting on top of Tohru.

"You're not a blow-up doll. Get moving!"

Fujishima started to move his hips. Like a piston, he moved in and out. It was a totally different feeling than all the other times.

The creaking of the bed frame echoed. Tohru's body was covered in sweat. He noticed that the air conditioning wasn't on. Tohru looked up at the sweaty and bruised body of the man on top of him. He suddenly remembered an incident from his childhood. At a festival he had won two goldfishes at a fairground stall. He had looked after them so carefully. He wondered what had happened to them.

He couldn't remember what had happened. Perhaps his brain had made the story up?

Suddenly his cock got even harder and with a groan, Tohru came. The slim body on top of him quivered. Tohru pushed Fujishima off him. Tohru pulled his condom off and discarded it. He turned around to look at his toy. To his disgust, he realized that Fujishima had come too. The tell-tale wet patch on the sheets betrayed Fujishima.

Tohru pulled his jeans back on. Fujishima was curled up on the bed. Fujishima looked up at Tohru and realized that Tohru was looking at his penis. He quickly pulled some pajama bottoms on. Tohru blushed. He yanked Fujishima's head by his hair.

"Pervert."

Fujishima gawped at Tohru. He looked like a dead fish.

Tohru remembered the end of the goldfish story. He had named his two goldfish after him and Fujishima. The big one he had called "bro," and the small one



"Tohru." The bigger one had died first. It had looked well, but one day when Tohru woke up, it was floating belly up in the water. Tohru had released the small one into the river. He remembered thinking that it would be eaten by a bigger fish.

Tohru didn't want to be alone. He didn't even want a fish named after him to be alone.

Tohru rode his mountain bike down the street. He had a bag of beer hanging from the handles.

It was past seven o'clock, but the air hadn't cooled down yet and the evening was muggy.

Tohru parked his bike outside Kusuda's apartment block. He untangled the bag from the bike handles. The weight of the bag caused the bag handles to cut into the flesh on his fingers. He pushed the doorbell and Kusuda called him in.

It was already September, but the heat of August had continued for longer this year. Kusuda had called and asked to speak to him. Tohru had the day off, so he agreed. Their usual haunt was closed on Wednesdays so they decided to drink at Kusuda's. They wouldn't be disturbed by anyone there either.

By the time Tohru had gotten into Kusuda's apartment, he'd drunk one of the beers. He was hot, sweaty and worn out from being outside. The beer satisfied his thirst.

"I'm totally useless," Kusuda muttered, as he crumpled his second 500ml beer can. "I only work at my

current company for the salary... I don't like the work."

Kusuda scratched his head as he watched the TV.

"I'm so tired of my job. It doesn't bring me any satisfaction. But it puts food on the table so I can't complain."

Tohru lit a cigarette and looked at Kusuda.

"I'm thinking of quitting..."

"Quitting?"

Kusuda nodded. "My older brother is a jeweler specializing in silver. He works at a brand called Delheart, but he wants to set up his own company. He asked me if I'd join him," Kusuda sighed and reached for another beer. "The only staff would be me and my brother. My brother already has customers so he could make it work. My girlfriend thinks I should be more careful. She's right. I do have a good stable income where I am now."

Kusuda sighed. He kicked back and stared at the ceiling.

"You're OK. You've always known what you want to do," Kusuda said.

"But I have no guarantees for the future. That's as bad as unemployment."

"Still, I'm jealous. I couldn't even tell you what I'd want to do with my life. The really clever guys are those who find what they want to do and go for it."

Tohru couldn't say anything. As far as Tohru was concerned, Kusuda was probably suited for office life the best. Tohru hadn't made it. He wanted to be a photographer, but he was far from achieving that goal. He didn't even walk around taking photos like he used to.

"When my brother asked me, I really wanted to go for it. I thought it could be fun running our own company. But my girlfriend made me think again. If I failed, I'd be left with nothing."

Both of them fell silent for a while. The sound of the TV filled the void. Laughter came from the screen and felt awkward in contrast to what Kusuda had just said. Tohru reached for his fourth beer.

"Even if you fail, it doesn't mean you're dead," Tohru advised him. Kusuda looked a little doubtful. Tohru continued, "I mean, it's not the end of the world."

After a short silence, Kusuda burst into laughter. Holding his sides, he fell about laughing. He patted Tohru on the back.

"You're right. It wouldn't be the end of the world!" Kusuda wiped the tears that had started streaming down his cheeks. "I'm glad I talked to you. You make everything sound so simple. It's not that simple, but you're right. Even if everything went wrong, I could find a part-time job and be able to survive."

Kusuda downed the beer in his hand.

"I'm gonna do it! And if it doesn't work, we'll work at a convenience store together!"

"No way."

"You better be nice to me, otherwise I won't get you a job at my multi-million dollar company!"

"You couldn't afford me!"

The two looked at each other and fell about laughing. Tohru was happy when he saw Kusuda was happy. He felt that if he could rely on anyone, it was Kusuda. There was no pretense in their relationship.

"Anyway, how is Fujishima-san?" Kusuda suddenly brought up that man's name, much to Tohru's irritation.

"Just like always..." Tohru answered.

"Oh? I met him at the station the other day. He looked like he'd lost weight."

"Lost weight?" Tohru sounded surprised. Kusuda frowned.

"How could you not have noticed? You see him every day. He's lost a lot of weight. He really didn't look himself. I wondered if he was ill."

Every evening... Well, almost every evening, Tohru had seen him. He had made Fujishima service him enough. But Tohru hadn't noticed he'd lost weight.

Tohru must have been using Fujishima instead of masturbation for a month. At first he'd forced Fujishima to give him blowjobs, but then when he realized that taking him felt better, Tohru had demanded that. Tohru would make him do the hard work too. After, Fujishima would be erect. It disgusted Tohru. He called Fujishima a pervert to calm his discomfort.

"Maybe the heat is getting to him?" Tohru tried to wriggle out of it.

"Perhaps..." Kusuda examined Tohru's face. "Are you getting on with Fujishima?"

"Why do you ask me that?"

"No reason. Just interested."

The conversation continued, but the thought that there was something wrong and he hadn't noticed haunted Tohru. He could almost taste the concern. He tried to wash it down with beer. As Tohru grew increasingly

drunk, he realized something...

Kusuda had been around when Tohru had the amnesia. He must have known that Tohru had been dating Fujishima. Homosexuality was weird. It wasn't normal. So why hadn't Kusuda stopped him? If Kusuda had stopped Tohru... If he had gotten him away from it all... Tohru wouldn't have been in that man's evil clutches for six years. Tohru felt a wave of hatred for the man he was drinking with. He had been a part of the crime! Tohru took the cigarette he'd been smoking and pushed it into an empty can.

"Hey," Tohru said in a raised voice.

"Not so loud. It's late," Kusuda tried to hush him.

"I know. I know what happened with Fujishima over those six years... I know all of it."

"Ah..." Kusuda's eyes betrayed his surprise. He looked at Tohru seriously.

"Did Fujishima-san tell you?"

"Yes, and..."

"How did you react?" Kusuda cut him off before he had a chance to continue. Tohru didn't know how to answer his question, though.

"How..."

"You must have been angry when you found out that your love for those six years had been a man. You weren't gay before, were you? It must have grossed you out."

"Yeah, it did."

Kusuda closed his eyes. He looked genuinely upset. "I thought you would be..."

"If you knew about the relationship, why didn't

you stop me?"

Kusuda downed his beer.

"I couldn't. By the time you told me, it had already happened. You'd been dating for two years when I found out."

"Still! It's not normal!"

"To be honest, I couldn't believe it either. But you seemed to be really into him, so I left it. Anyway, Fujishima-san is a good guy."

It seemed ridiculous to Tohru that he could have really liked Fujishima. That evil scumbag must have really pulled the wool over his eyes.

"You're different from how you were when you were suffering from the amnesia, but you seemed genuinely happy when you were with Fujishima-san. You often went traveling together. You wanted to be a pâtissier because Fujishima-san likes cake so much."

Tohru thought he would have been unhappy. He had been forced into a physical relationship he wouldn't have wanted. If that was the case, how could he have been enjoying himself? That didn't make sense. Tohru's head was spinning with questions. As he tried to sort out the tumbling mess, something came to the fore – the photographs. That other version of himself had been smiling in each and every one.

"You might not think of Fujishima-san as an object of your affection now, but don't be cruel to him. It would really hurt him."

This wasn't what Tohru wanted to hear!

"He tricked me! I knew nothing about myself and he took advantage!"

"That might be how it looks to you now. But you two were really in love. Even if you had lost your memories, Fujishima-san would never have done anything that you didn't want to do."

Tohru couldn't say anything. He felt like he had been hit in the stomach. He couldn't breathe properly.

"You might not like it, but the relationship you had with Fujishima-san was consensual. He didn't trick you. I think you really fell in love with him."

Tohru coughed. His hands were shaking. Kusuda still had more to say, though.

"When your memories came back, Fujishima-san asked me not to tell you. He was thinking of you. He didn't want you to be upset over something you couldn't remember. I'm surprised Fujishima-san told you in the end. He must have hoped you'd remember..."

Tohru couldn't cope with this. It didn't make sense. The situation didn't make sense. Fujishima had been in the wrong. Tohru was a victim.

"Fujishima is a liar! He's scum!"

How could Kusuda stand up for Fujishima? Tohru knew what he really was. An evil betrayer who would take every chance he could get.

"If Fujishima-san really was scum, do you think he would have taken you in when your memories came back and looked after you?"

"It was because he wanted me."

"What?"

"He wanted my body..."

Kusuda's eyes went wide with surprise. After a few minutes hesitation, he burst into laughter.

"You're funny! A small, little thing like Fujishima forcing a built man like you. Anyway, Fujishima is way more attractive than you!"

Tohru looked at his hands. His hands were large. He wasn't a small child anymore. Fujishima couldn't force Tohru... Not again. No matter what Fujishima did, Tohru could push back.

Tohru suddenly stood up, but he realized he was too drunk. He tried to walk but ended up falling over.

"What do you think you're doing?!" Kusuda cackled.

"Going...home..."

"How are you going to get home like that?! I'd like to see you ride your bike. Stay here."

Tohru sat back down. His head hurt. He could see all the smiling photos in his head. They were flashing in front of his eyes, one by one. He wanted to talk to the person he was for those six years. He wanted to know why he'd lived with Fujishima.

Tohru must have fallen asleep at some point. When he opened his eyes, it was the middle of the night. Next to him Kusuda was snoring away surrounded by discarded beer cans. After drinking some water from the kitchen, Tohru left Kusuda's apartment. It was three in the morning. He sped down the dark streets on his mountain bike. There were no cars. It felt like Tohru was the only person left in this world.

He arrived back at the apartment building, but instead of going straight in, he went to the nearby park. He leaned his bike against a tree and sat down on a bench. There was no breeze that night. He sat there, lonely and

sad. He was mad at himself for hesitating to go in.

Tohru clutched his skull. Those naked photos... So many photos of him and Fujishima naked... They must have used a Polaroid camera so they wouldn't have to get them developed. At first he thought that Fujishima must have taken them for his own perverted pleasure. But now Tohru wondered if they were his pictures...

Tohru tried to distance himself from it and think rationally. Why would those photos have been taken? Finally, he realized...

People took photos to save treasured memories. Lovers take pictures of themselves because they want something to remind them, to take with them. Could it be that?

It was starting to get light when Tohru finally returned to the apartment building. The hall light was on. Tohru went straight to his bedroom and lay down on the bed. He couldn't sleep. He heard footsteps in the hall. He pressed his ear to the door but couldn't hear anything. He opened his door. The hall light had been switched off.

Tohru slowly walked down the dark hall until he was standing in front of Fujishima's room. He stood there for a while, but unable to say anything, he went back to his own room.

Tohru wanted to know if Fujishima had been waiting for him to get home. But he just didn't know how to ask.

On Saturday evening, Tohru visited Fujishima's room some time after ten o'clock. He didn't knock on the door; he just opened it. Fujishima didn't seem surprised though. He was sitting at his desk. He slowly turned around.

The curtain fluttered. His window was wide open. The air conditioning was on too.

Tohru wanted to talk, but he didn't know what to say. He didn't know where to start. He knew they had to talk after his drinking session with Kusuda. He didn't know what they were going to talk about.

Tohru sat down on Fujishima's bed. Fujishima shuffled closer. Tohru unzipped his pants. Doing it was much easier than talking.

Tohru looked at the man's face now buried in his thighs. If he had really been in love with Fujishima for six years, how had the other Tohru felt about him?

Tohru grunted that he wanted Fujishima on top of him, and Fujishima obliged. Of course, he didn't face Tohru.

Fujishima pumped up and down on Tohru. Even sex wasn't going to bring back Tohru's memories of that time. But he couldn't deny the pleasure he was feeling.

Tohru lifted his body and Fujishima slouched forward. It looked like Fujishima was having trouble. His body was quivering. Tohru caught a glimpse of his body under the pajamas. Each vertebra was clearly visible with just a thin layer of skin covering them. Fujishima looked like a malnourished cat. All across Fujishima's back were yellow and crimson bruises.

Tohru closed his eyes and rolled over to sleep.

Fujishima didn't stop though. Once Tohru had come, Fujishima pulled Tohru out of him and then cleaned up the condom. Tohru looked at Fujishima's crotch. There was no erection his time. But there was a strange wet patch on the front of his pajamas. He must have come before Tohru did.

Fujishima went to his closet and removed his soiled pajamas. Tohru considered going back to his own room, but he changed his mind. He didn't want to be alone tonight.

"Turn around."

"Huh?"

"We've done it from behind. Make me hard and put it in."

"But..."

"Just do it," Tohru yelled.

Fujishima got back onto the bed. He was totally naked now. He touched Tohru. It took time for Fujishima to get a second erection out of Tohru. Slowly but surely, with a massage and mouth teasing. It took about thirty minutes for Tohru to be hard enough for penetration. He kneeled on the bed and pushed himself in to Fujishima from the front.

"Ngh..."

As Tohru moved his hips, he watched Fujishima's manhood react.

The front of Fujishima's body was also covered in bruises and marks. There were fewer areas that weren't bruised than were. The thing that caught Tohru's eyes was Fujishima's nipples. They were small red mountains in a sea of yellow. They were beautiful.

He looked at Fujishima's face. It looked tired. Suddenly Tohru stopped. Fujishima looked to one side so as not to catch Tohru's eyes. Tohru leaned over as if to kiss Fujishima. Fujishima stopped him. Instead he put his hands over Tohru's eyes.

"What are you doing?"

"I don't want you to see."

"That's why I'm asking you what you're doing."

"You said that you would lose your hard on."

He was right. Every other time Tohru had taken him from behind. Tohru had totally forgotten. Tohru kept going. He wanted to reach the height of pleasure.

Tohru started thrusting again. He felt himself being inside Fujishima and Fujishima's hard cock pushing against his stomach. With his eyes covered, the excitement was heightened.

He came. Fujishima lay on the bed, panting. He looked exhausted. The second time must have tired him out. Fujishima wiped himself up.

Usually Tohru would go back to his bedroom at this point. He didn't want to tonight. Instead he got into Fujishima's bed. Tohru wasn't tired, but he closed his eyes and feigned sleep. He wondered what Fujishima was thinking.

He heard a shuffling noise. Fujishima was probably changing into fresh pajamas. Tohru heard footsteps approaching. Fujishima was next to him.

"Tohru?" Fujishima said faintly. Tohru didn't answer. Fujishima pulled the sheets over Tohru. It was a very motherly action.

The sound of the clock echoed. Every now and

then he heard a car drive past the apartment block.

"Tohru," Fujishima called him again.

Fujishima touched Tohru's hand. His touch was so gentle.

Tohru didn't open his eyes. He was afraid that if he did, Fujishima wouldn't be there.

"Sorry it's late, but happy birthday."

Tohru had turned twenty-nine the day before. He didn't care for birthdays, though. He hadn't celebrated. Even he had forgotten it was his birthday. Fujishima clearly hadn't forgotten, though.

"I got you a present..."

While Fujishima gently stroked Tohru's skin, he fell asleep. When he woke up again, it was past four o'clock in the morning. It was dark. Fujishima wasn't there. Tohru went looking for him and found him wrapped up in a blanket on the sofa.

Tohru looked down at the man. He felt rage boiling up. How dare he leave me, Tohru thought. He wouldn't say anything when he was awake, but he would talk when Tohru was sleeping. Tohru couldn't express the feelings he had. But he wasn't going to beat up a sleeping man.

It was a Saturday evening at the end of December. For the past few days Tohru had been locked away in his room preparing a project for school. He woke up on the morning of the deadline and heaved a sigh of relief that he was going to make it.

After school, his classmates had invited him to celebrate the end of the project, so he ended up in a friend's apartment. Tohru didn't have time to go home before work started so he headed straight there. When Tohru did get home sometime around two o'clock in the morning, he noticed that the hall light wasn't on as usual. Tohru turned on the light and saw that Fujishima's shoes weren't there.

He went into the living room. The air was stuffy so the first thing that Tohru did was open a window. The cold evening air rushed in. It felt refreshing and cool.

Tohru wondered if Fujishima had fallen asleep after work, but when Tohru went to check Fujishima's room, he wasn't there either. Perhaps something happened at work and he had to stay late, Tohru thought. It was a possibility but Tohru still felt that something wasn't right. He hadn't hit or kicked Fujishima recently.

In fact Tohru had been the one who was acting weird. He wanted sex everyday but he wanted to see Fujishima's erection as well. He liked seeing Fujishima's body being excited. He hadn't admitted it to himself yet.

Last week, Tohru had waited for Fujishima to come home from work and had taken him to bed straight away. He wanted to do it before dinner. He had tied Fujishima's penis with a neck tie so he could control his toy's orgasm. Tohru liked it better when they reached a climax together.

Fujishima rarely made any noise, but always looked like he was about to cry. When Tohru embraced him from behind, he would tweak Fujishima's nipples.

Fujishima shook his head. Just before Tohru was about to come, he untied the neck tie. A white spray of liquid shot out. Their bodies trembled together.

Fujishima's penis then flopped down. His whole body looked relaxed apart from his nipples, which were still hard. Tohru was captivated by them. However, every time Fujishima saw Tohru staring at his body, he blushed.

They did it again from behind. Tohru nibbled Fujishima's white flesh as they did it. It heightened Tohru's pleasure. Tohru came again.

After sex, he thought Fujishima might leave. He didn't want that. He pulled Fujishima into his chest.

Tired after their orgasms, they lay in bed together. They didn't clean themselves up. They fell asleep without dinner. When Tohru woke up in the middle of the night, Tohru felt Fujishima still there. He was shocked at how much he wanted Fujishima there.

"Get out," he screamed, irritated at himself.

Fujishima left, but Tohru could still smell him on the sheets.

He wondered when he would come back and put the entrance hall light on. He sat on the sofa and put some night TV on. Soon he had fallen to sleep again.

He woke up in the morning. Fujishima hadn't come back. The TV was still on. Tohru felt angry. He turned off all the lights and went back to his room. He closed his eyes, but he couldn't sleep. When he did manage to nod off, the sky was bright.

He woke in the afternoon. Fujishima still wasn't back. Tohru thought it was strange he hadn't been

back at all even if he was busy at work. The feeling of loneliness started to grow inside Tohru. What if there had been an accident? What if Fujishima was seriously injured and couldn't contact him? Would someone know to call here?

Tohru grabbed his camera and wallet and left. He couldn't stand being in the apartment. He was worrying too much. He wasn't a child. He shouldn't worry that Fujishima hadn't been home for a few days.

Tohru didn't want to take any photos. He just wanted to keep moving. He stopped on a bridge. The wind was so strong that he felt it might take him away. The atmosphere was heavy. It felt like a storm was coming.

Tohru wandered around outside for three hours. On his way home, he stopped by a bakery. He walked home, pushing the mountain bike, carefully cradling the cake box. Tohru told himself that it wasn't to make Fujishima happy, but because it looked so delicious.

The apartment hadn't changed. The hallway was quiet. Tohru could only hear himself. Perhaps Fujishima had run away, Tohru started to think. Tohru suddenly shivered all over. He was on his own. He'd been left all on his own again. He threw the cake box against the wall...

He was angry but devastated at the same time. Fujishima had always been here, even when Tohru had beaten him to a pulp. Why wasn't he here now?

Suddenly the door bell rang out in the silent apartment. Tohru swung the door open. But the person standing there was not the tiny Fujishima; it was a

woman. She looked about thirty. Her eyebrows had been carefully drawn on in arches. She had short hair. No one would have been able to deny that she was a beauty.

"Long time, no see."

She wore a white shirt over some black pants. In her hand was a briefcase. She looked like a working woman. Perhaps it was one of Fujishima's friends from work. However, she seemed to know Tohru.

"It must be six years. You're looking good."

Six years ago... That would have been when he still had his memories! It must have been someone from his old life. Tohru racked his brains. He had got drunk in bars with women and slept with more than a few. However, most of them had been for one night only. Tohru didn't think a woman that he had slept with once would go to all the trouble of finding him six years later. Tohru reasoned that she must have been someone he knew when he had the amnesia.

The woman must have noticed the troubled look on Tohru's face. She smiled.

"You've forgotten me? I'm Satoko Kinoshita."

Tohru remembered the name. This was the woman he'd been transferring part of his monthly salary to.

"I had to come to this area for work, so I thought I'd stop by. Can I come in? I'm sure we have things to talk about. First, I wanted to thank you for my brother's flowers. You always remembered the anniversary of his death. It was a comfort."

Tohru showed her to the living room. He got some coffee for her as she was a guest. She thanked him and took a sip. Tohru examined the woman. She said

something about flowers. He must have been close to her if he was sending flowers to mark the anniversary of her brother's death.

Tohru started wondering about the money he'd been giving her. Perhaps he had borrowed money from her. That seemed a natural explanation. The amnesia version of him had borrowed a large amount of money from her.

"The weather is bad. Apparently there is a typhoon coming."

Tohru grunted a reply.

"Is he here today?"

She must have been referring to Fujishima.

"No," Tohru replied.

"I see. Well, I'm glad you're here. I didn't know what to do because all I was getting was your answering machine." Satoko stopped to take another sip of coffee. "It's no big deal. I just wanted to return this to you."

The woman took a largish paper bag from her case and placed it on the table.

"What's this," Tohru asked.

"This is the money that you transferred to my account. It's almost 6,000,000 yen."

Tohru's finger twitched to hear such a large sum.

"I discussed it with my parents. When we didn't get any money in January, we thought that perhaps you were having problems. We didn't need the money so we thought that we should return it to you."

Tohru didn't understand. This was money to pay back the money he'd been transferring monthly. 6,000,000 yen was a lot of money. He didn't like it,

though. Tohru didn't feel that the money was really his. If Fujishima was here, he could have explained, but the one time that Tohru needed him, he wasn't there.

"Umm... I lost my memories in an accident..."

"I know."

This surprised Tohru. The only other person who knew that Tohru had had amnesia was Kusuda.

"I don't remember you."

"Have you got amnesia again?!" The woman sounded surprised.

"No. I've recovered. But the memories from when I had the amnesia are gone. So I don't understand this money."

Satoko stared at him.

"If your memories are back, do you remember the accident?"

"Accident?"

"The accident that gave you the amnesia..."

"I don't remember anything about the accident. I was drunk and seriously injured, but I'm fine now." Tohru was hesitant. He didn't understand where this was going.

"You don't remember anything?" Satoko's voice sounded tense.

"Umm..."

"Didn't he tell you?"

Satoko's tone was starting to strain. She kept repeating the same thing about the accident.

"Fujishima just told me that I'd been seriously injured."

"I can't believe it," Satoko muttered. "You forgot

something so terrible. I envy you. Anyway, I'm returning the money to you. We don't need it. Maybe returning the money will help release you from your guilt."

"Guilt?" Tohru stared at her. A strong wind rattled the window. Satoko said nothing in return. Usually this would have pleased Tohru, but he needed to know this time.

"I don't remember. Can you just tell me?"

Tohru hit his hand down on the table. The noise surprised the woman into talking.

"Six years ago, you were drunk and fell asleep at the wheel. Your car swerved into oncoming traffic. You hit the car that my little brother was driving... He was killed instantly."

"What..." Tohru couldn't take this in.

"I'm just telling you the truth," Satoko said coldly.

Tohru put his hand to his forehead. He remembered taking the company car to go for a drink, but he didn't remember anything after that.

"It was my fault?"

"What do you think?" Satoko clearly wasn't enjoying recalling this.

"I knew I had an accident, but Fujishima didn't tell me anyone else was involved."

If Tohru had been in a fatal accident, why hadn't he gone to jail? There were too many inconsistencies for him to accept what this woman was saying.

"I would have gone to jail if it had been my fault."

"You should have done."

"What the hell do you mean?!"

"You weren't punished because the police didn't make it officially your mistake!"

"Look, lady, I think you've made a mistake. I'm not important enough for the police to turn a blind eye."

"Money can buy anything these days."

"Where would I get that sort of money?!"

"You may not have, but there was someone who did."

Tohru thought of Fujishima immediately.

"You mean..."

"He used his money to make your murderous mistake go away!"

She crossed her arms and glared at Tohru.

"He wouldn't do that for me."

"Why not?"

"Why not..."

"He paid the police off and then you both ran away. He must have really cared for you... I still think he should have let you face the music."

Satoko's entire body was shaking in rage. Every word was full of pure emotion.

"I don't remember! You suddenly come in here, saying all this crap! How dare you!" Tohru screamed.

Satoko looked taken aback by this turn in Tohru's temperament. She said nothing, but picked up her bag and left the room. Tohru noticed that she had left the envelope of money on the table. Tohru chased after her.

"Take this with you. I don't want it."

Tohru tried to push the envelope in her hands. She wouldn't take it. Instead the envelope fell to the ground,



scattering 10,000 yen bills all over the hall.

"You haven't changed," Satoko muttered. "You used to beg my forgiveness. You would cry and cry. This is what you're really like, though!" She hissed through gritted teeth.

Tohru felt anger, but he realized that he should apologize for what he did to this woman's family. Still, how could he be sure she was telling the truth...?

"If you don't believe me, ask Fujishima! He'll tell you exactly what you did."

A sharp breeze came through the open door. Tohru thought the onslaught was over but she hadn't finished.

"It's all right for you! You've forgotten all the things you did! You forgot about my brother. I came here to say that I forgive you. I wanted to say that you should move on and not worry about us anymore." Satoko grimaced. "Look at you. You really don't remember."

Tohru didn't respond.

"If you don't believe me, look at Fujishima's stomach. He should have the scar still."

"Scar...?"

"I couldn't forgive you for killing my brother. I looked for you everywhere. When I found you, I was going to kill you. But he got in the way and I stabbed him instead."

Tohru's mind went blank. Suddenly Satoko wasn't there anymore. All he was left with was the sound of the wind whistling through the apartment.

Tohru didn't know how long he stood standing in the entrance hall. He was shaken back to the real world by his phone ringing. He felt he should answer it, but the phone stopped ringing just as he reached it. Tohru staggered over to the sofa and collapsed onto it. He rubbed his head with his hand.

He had murdered someone. He had killed someone. But he didn't remember a thing. Tohru wondered what he was like. What did he look like? Tohru knew nothing. It couldn't be real. It didn't feel real.

It had been a car accident. He had drunk too much to drive. He hadn't meant to do it. But...he had still murdered someone.

Yet he hadn't been punished for it. Why had Fujishima protected him? He should have left him to what he deserved.

Tohru looked at his hands. These were the hands of a killer. They didn't look any different from a normal pair of hands, but these hands had taken someone's life.

"Ah..." Tohru groaned. He had to let something out even if it was just senseless noise. Otherwise, he was going to burst into tears. It was too late though, and he felt a warm drop hit his knee.

He didn't even know the face of the boy he had killed. Tohru was crying for this faceless victim. Or maybe he was just crying for his own unlucky fate. His chest felt tight. He felt like he couldn't breathe. Tohru felt he should have died. He could have died in the accident and everything would be better. Why had he been allowed to live? Why had he even been born? If his mother was just going to throw him aside, why had she

even bothered giving birth to him?

There had been so many opportunities for the world to kill him off. When his stepmother had beaten him... in the car accident... But he was still alive. He kept breathing. But each day brought fresh pain.

"Fu-Fujishima..." Tohru groaned. No answer was forthcoming, though.

Fujishima wasn't home. He had left Tohru. When Tohru needed him to be here, he wasn't. It was just the same as back then, when Fujishima's mother had beaten him and locked him up.

"Brother!" Tohru called out, but again there was no answer.

Tohru was a sobbing heap now. He kept calling out for Fujishima. It hurt so much. At some point he passed out. He couldn't remember the time.

No matter how many years passed, the same things kept happening. There was pain over and over again. He called out for Fujishima.

The window rattled. The wind was ferocious. Tohru opened the door that led out onto the balcony. The rain hit his face with great force.

The wind was so strong, it threatened to carry him away. Below he could see the branches of the trees being rocked this way and that. He couldn't keep his eyes open too long in the beating rain, though. Tohru clutched onto the railings of the balcony. If he jumped now, he would fall into the darkness.

But what did it matter? He was as dark as it got. Everything inside him was black. Tohru stretched his hand out into the black. He couldn't see anything, but

he reached out as if to grab for something. As he did so, his right ankle gave way and he slipped. In a panic he grabbed out for the railing.

He screamed out into the blackness, but his voice was drowned by the sound of the approaching storm.

He was soaked and cold. He went back into the apartment and took off his wet clothes. Totally naked, he felt defenseless. Tohru realized that he hadn't changed much since he was a child. He thought that because he was big, things were different inside too. But they weren't; they were the same.

Like a lost child, he walked around the living room totally naked. The room was dark and he couldn't see where he was going and he stubbed his toe on the TV stand. Walking out into the hall, he realized that there was something stuck to his feet. He looked down at his feet. It took him a few moments to realize that it was the money that Satoko had left.

Stepping through the bills, he walked to Fujishima's room. He turned on the light. The room was the same - pristine and tidy. Tohru collapsed onto Fujishima's bed. It smelled of Fujishima. Burying himself in the sheets, he breathed in deep. It felt familiar and safe, but it only made his sobs all the more violent.

"Help me..." Tohru cried pitifully. All he wanted was that he would be here. He wanted to be told that he hadn't caused the accident. He wanted to be told that he hadn't done anything wrong.

But that wasn't ever going to happen. He had killed someone. That was the truth. It was never going to go away. Nothing could make it go away.

His tears soaked the bed. He had committed a crime. Satoko said that Fujishima had helped him run away from that crime. So he was an even worse criminal. Fujishima should have just left him. Why did Fujishima let him live here?

Ever since Tohru had been in high school, all he had done to Fujishima was hit and abuse him. No matter what Fujishima had done. Tohru had only ever done bad things to Fujishima. So why had he helped Tohru?

Satoko said that Fujishima had protected him. Fujishima had paid money to make Tohru's crime go away... He had been protecting Tohru. Tohru wondered why. What was the crime? Or was it just guilt? Tohru didn't know.

He wanted to ask Fujishima. Why had he helped a criminal? Why had Fujishima not mentioned the accident when he got his memories back? Tohru needed to know why Fujishima had helped a total scumbag like Tohru.

Tohru opened the drawers of Fujishima's desk. He wanted to find something that would tell him where Fujishima had gone. Tohru searched the bookshelves and under the bed. He couldn't find a single hint.

Tohru didn't know what he should do. He didn't know where to look. In a rage, he pulled the books from the shelves and threw them onto the bed. He tore the photos that fluttered out of the albums.

He ripped and ripped until not an inch of floor could be seen under the scraps of photos. Tearing up Fujishima's belongings wasn't enough. He needed to destroy more.

Tohru smashed his computer. He ripped the sheets

and curtains. Everything Tohru could see, he broke. Suddenly he slipped on the mess he had created, bringing him to the floor. He hit his head on the descent.

"Uwaaaah!" he screamed.

He didn't scream from pain, though. He screamed because he was alone. His mother had thrown him away. He didn't have a real father, and the boy he considered a brother betrayed him. Why did he always end up alone?

He had taken Fujishima for granted. He had assumed that he would always be there. Tohru had beaten him, forced him to have sex. He had never even considered that one day Fujishima wouldn't come home.

Tohru's screams turned into prolonged sobs. Suddenly the phone rang. In the chaos of his mind, a normal sound was enough for Tohru to pull himself together.

Tohru fled the room. He ran into the hall. He slipped again on the bills scattered over the floor. It didn't hurt. Tohru grabbed at the receiver.

"FUJISHIMA!"

"OW! Why the hell are you screaming at me?!"

The voice on the phone wasn't Fujishima. It was Kusuda. Tohru couldn't answer him. Tohru wanted to talk to Fujishima.

"Has something happened?"

"Fujishima hasn't come home."

"Huh?" Kusuda sounded troubled.

"I said he hasn't come home! I haven't seen him since yesterday."

"Maybe he's on a business trip? Did you try his

cell phone?"

"Cell...cell phone?"

"Fujishima-san has a cell." Tohru was silent. "I guess you don't know Fujishima-san's number?"

Kusuda was smart when it came to reading Tohru.

Tohru had a phone. It had been the same one he had used for those six years. It had lots of names and numbers in it. He didn't like all these strangers calling him, though. So he had cancelled the contract. Tohru thought it was stupid to carry a mobile that had belonged to the other him. He only ever contacted Kusuda, so he just made use of the home phone. Because he didn't use a cell, he hadn't even considered that someone else would.

"You canceled your old contract, right? You should call Fujishima-san. I have his number. Write this down."

Tohru scribbled the number down on a memo pad. Kusuda was about to say something else, but Tohru ignored him and hung up. Tohru immediately called the number. However, Fujishima didn't pick up. All Tohru got was the answering service. Tohru hung up and tried again. The same thing happened. He repeated this procedure. He felt his mind distancing itself from his physical actions. Suddenly...

"Yes?"

Fujishima had picked up!

"WHERE ARE YOU?" Tohru didn't hold his emotions back.

"Is that Tohru?"

"Did you hear me? Where the hell are you?" Tohru was mad.

"In Izu," Fujishima said. Tohru could hear voices in the background.

"Why are you in Izu?"

"A company trip. Wait a minute..."

Tohru could hear the sounds of him moving. The voices were sounding more distant now.

"I'm at a party, so it's noisy. Everyone is drinking. I've had a little. I heard there is a typhoon coming. Are you okay?"

"Why didn't you tell me that you were going to Izu?"

Fujishima hesitated before answering.

"I forgot... I was going to tell you. You seemed so busy. I had to leave in the morning and I didn't want to wake you, so I left a note on the table..."

"I didn't see a note!"

"Strange... I was in a rush so maybe I left it somewhere else. I'm sorry for worrying you. I'm coming home tomorrow."

Tohru hung up without allowing Fujishima to finish. He turned the light on in the living room. He looked around the table. Under the sofa he spotted something white. He picked it up. It was a note:

I'm going to Izu for two nights on a company trip.

Fujishima hadn't abandoned Tohru. He had just gone on a trip and even left a note. There was no lie.

Tohru felt a wave of relief. Just the thought of Fujishima leaving him had thrown him into a panic. Tohru hadn't realized it before, but he had come to rely on Fujishima being near him. He needed Fujishima.

Tohru didn't want to get his expectations up. No matter how kind Fujishima acted, Tohru couldn't trust him. It would only lead to pain. Trust only led to the greatest betrayals. That's the sort of man Fujishima was. Fujishima had taken advantage of Tohru when he was vulnerable. If Fujishima really was kind, he wouldn't have touched Tohru. He would have thought of Tohru's feelings.

Tohru screwed the note up into a ball and threw it into the trashcan. Tohru wanted to see Fujishima but at the same time he didn't. He wanted Fujishima to be here, but he didn't. He wanted to trust Fujishima, but he didn't. He wanted to need Fujishima, but he didn't. Tohru's head was full of opposites. He didn't know what he wanted Fujishima to do or be to him.

The next morning Tohru collected the bills that were scattered in the hall, and stuffed them into his closet. He then paced the length of his room like a dog with a sore head. He knew that Fujishima was coming back but he couldn't shake his unease. He hadn't slept well that night. His senses were heightened so the sound of the storm was a cacophony to him. When day broke, he saw on the news that the storm had passed.

The evening came, and Fujishima finally came

home. Tohru was suffering from sleep deprivation. He was sitting huddled on the sofa when he heard the door open. Tohru flew out into the hall. Fujishima had just put his briefcase down and was taking off his shoes.

"I'm back," Fujishima said with a smile. "I'm sorry I worried you. I thought you had my cell number in your phone memory..."

Tohru grabbed Fujishima's arms and pulled him from the entryway and into the hall. He led Fujishima to his bedroom and threw Fujishima on to the bed.

Tohru yanked Fujishima's pants down. This time he wasn't after Fujishima's sex organ. He needed to know if Satoko had been lying. Tohru desperately hoped that he wouldn't find anything, but there it was. A large red scar. Tohru hadn't noticed it among the bruises.

Satoko hadn't lied... It was exactly how she said. Tohru had killed someone. He had killed someone, and Fujishima hadn't told him. Fujishima had hidden the truth from Tohru. Tohru was terrified. Inside he was screaming for help.

Tohru felt the touch of fingers to his face. The fingers moved the hair from his eyes. They had had sex many times, but this was the first time that Fujishima had caressed him in this way. Tohru pulled himself up. He needed some distance. He stared at Fujishima, and then approached the bed again.

He bent over. Their lips were millimeters apart. For a moment the revelations seemed far, far away. Suddenly a part of Tohru realized what he was doing and he pulled back. He had killed someone! What was he doing?

"Tohru," Fujishima said. The way Fujishima said his name made it sound beautiful and not the name of a murderer.

Tohru looked down at the man. He unzipped his jeans and pulled his pants down.

"Suck it."

Fujishima looked confused for a brief moment, but obediently he did as he was told. Fujishima took Tohru's cock into his mouth. However, Tohru soon lost his erection.

"Do it properly! More suction!"

Tohru hit Fujishima, leaving another red mark on his white flesh. However, no matter how much Fujishima worked on Tohru, the erection wasn't coming back. Tohru blamed Fujishima and hit him again. Tohru scratched his nails down his back to leave red marks that oozed blood.

All Tohru could think of was how evil this man was, and how perverted Fujishima was to do this to Tohru.

Tohru pulled his penis out of Fujishima's mouth. It was damp. Fujishima's spit looked a little like semen the way it glistened.

Tohru kicked Fujishima and he fell off the bed, hitting the floor with a low moan. Tohru continued to kick him. When Tohru was tired of kicking, he grabbed Fujishima's hair and punched him in the face. Tohru hated Fujishima. Tohru felt nothing as he lashed out. He didn't like anyone. He hated life. He didn't care about some stranger he had killed.

One particularly violent kick pushed Fujishima into

the bookshelf. He crumpled to the floor, motionless. Tohru was suddenly filled with fear. He had killed Fujishima!

He ran over and breathed a sigh of relief. He was still breathing. Slowly Fujishima opened his eyes.

His eyes were full of terror. He looked like a small animal staring straight into the jaws of his predator. Tohru looked at the quivering body in front of him. He was filled with the realization that he could have killed Fujishima if he had kept hitting him. Fujishima would have been dead and it would have been Tohru's fault.

Tohru scrambled back from the broken man.

"Get out! Get out! GET OUT!" Tohru screamed.

Fujishima stumbled up. He collected the clothes Tohru had discarded. Fujishima had looked so happy when he had come home, but now his face was a picture of total dejection.

With Fujishima gone, Tohru punched the wall. He didn't know how to release all the anger inside. He wanted to go find Fujishima, but he knew if he did, he would only hit him again. He couldn't control himself. Tohru feared that he would do something even worse to Fujishima.

Tohru had so badly wanted Fujishima to come home. He had felt so lonely. He had been so happy when Fujishima had returned, but then he had hit him. He couldn't stop himself from lashing out.

Tohru slid down the wall and clutched his head. He didn't know what to do. He wanted to run away from the solitude and remorse.

The rest of the night there were sounds from Fujishima's room. Tohru imagined him tidying up the

mess Tohru had made.

The day after Fujishima came back from Izu, Tohru went to the library. He wanted to look at the old newspapers. He found the report of the accident six years ago, but it hadn't taken up many columns. There were no photos and the details of the accident were just described briefly. The name of the victim was reported, but Tohru's name wasn't there.

The next day Tohru took a day off from school and went back to the town where he'd lived. Tohru visited the local police station and asked if he could get the address of the man who had died, but they wouldn't give it to him. Tohru walked down the highway where the accident had taken place. It didn't bring back any memories of what happened.

Tohru placed some flowers by the side of the street. He stood looking at the crash barrier. The trucks passing by him blew his hair around. It would be so easy to throw himself in front of traffic. Tohru wouldn't care at this point.

Tohru stood there for some time, and it wasn't until the sun started to set that he walked away. The wind was cold.

Tohru returned to the apartment some time after ten o'clock. He took his shoes off and stepped into the hallway. He went straight to his room, collapsed onto the bed and closed his eyes. Tohru had walked a bit too far today and he was tired. He wanted to visit the family and

the grave... But it was just for him.

Tohru wondered what the man he had killed was like. He had parents and an older sister... He had more people in his life than Tohru did.

Tohru wished he could talk to the deceased stranger. Tell him that if Tohru could change things, he would gladly take his place in the grave.

There was a knock on the door. Tohru heaved himself from the bed. There was another knock. Tohru didn't reply.

"There was a phone call for you today," Fujishima said quietly. "It was from someone called Sakagami-san. He wanted to know why you weren't in class."

Tohru could hear Fujishima's feet on the floor. He must have gone straight back to his room. When Tohru was sure that he had gone, he opened his door. Fujishima wasn't there.

He hadn't seen Fujishima since the night he almost killed him. Tohru had tried to avoid him. He was terrified that he would really kill Fujishima given a chance.

Maybe it was best if he moved out, Tohru thought. He went over it in his head so many times. Perhaps he should leave, for both him and Fujishima. Tohru didn't have the strength to cut all ties, though.

Tohru left his room and walked down the hall. He stood in front of Fujishima's room, staring at the door. Tohru had destroyed Fujishima's room, but he hadn't apologized. In his heart, he had apologized so many times; Tohru just couldn't get the words out.

In the end, Tohru said nothing and returned to his room. He pulled the sheets over his head and closed his

eyes. The only things he could think of were the dead man and Fujishima.

October came. Tohru started taking his studies more seriously. When he was thinking about photos, he thought less about Fujishima and the man he had killed.

Every month the students were expected to submit a project. Tohru's teacher had told him that his world was always too self-centered. Apparently the composition of the photos was good, but they had no soul. The first time his teacher told him this, Tohru got mad. But the teacher had said it so many times, Tohru had gotten numb to it and it didn't make him mad anymore. He couldn't argue with the criticism. There was nothing inside Tohru. Of course his pictures had no heart.

At the beginning of November, the class was assigned to work with a partner on their project. The topic was "light and shadow." The teacher chose the partners, and Tohru was paired with a nineteen-year-old girl named Eguchi. Tohru was good at still life, while Eguchi was best at photographs of people. They were going to have to decide on a motif to work on together for this project.

There wasn't enough time to decide at school, so they had to meet up at their homes. Eguchi had a lot of siblings and it was hard to get some quiet time at hers, so they usually met at Tohru's place. They spent a lot of time trying to work out a theme. Finally they settled on animals as a subject. They wanted to draw contrasts

between the animals humans kept as pets and the ones that they ate. The theme would be 'yin and yang.'

Tohru spent a long time working out how to capture his vision best. In the end he decided to photograph the freezers of a meat factory, and a small girl holding a rabbit in her arms. When displayed together the photos were a terrifying contrast.

"Thanks for offering to submit it tomorrow, Tohru," Eguchi said in the hall as she got ready to leave.

Just as her hand was on the door knob, the door opened and Fujishima appeared in the open doorway. He'd just come back from work. However, he wasn't wearing his coat over his white shirt.

Fujishima's mouth opened a little. He seemed shocked.

"Sorry," Fujishima said quietly.

"Oh! I'm the one who should be sorry. See you later, Tohru-kun."

Fujishima watched Eguchi leave. The door closed and it was just the two of them. Tohru quickly retreated to his room.

The next day, Tohru came back from work after two o'clock in the morning. He was too tired to take a shower so he just collapsed on his bed. He planned to fall straight to sleep, but there was a knock on his door.

"I need to talk to you," Fujishima said. It had been a long time since he had last tried to talk to Tohru. Tohru looked at his watch: it was 2:15. It was far too late for Fujishima to have anything minor to say. Tohru was a little worried.

"You don't have to answer. I just need you to

listen," Fujishima called out to him again.

Tohru got up from the bed and walked to the door so he could hear better.

"You've had your memories back for a year. I know that you're settled here, but I think it's time that you should leave."

Tohru's blood ran cold.

"We have our own lives. We've basically been living alone anyway. Of course, I'll keep supporting you financially until you graduate."

Tohru flung the door open. Fujishima was in his pajamas. He jumped back in fear. Still, Tohru could see something in Fujishima's expression that he didn't quite understand.

"Am I just extra baggage that you want to get rid of?"

Fujishima looked up at Tohru. There was something in Fujishima's eyes...

"I'm not saying that. I'll keep supporting you. We just won't be together."

Together.... Tohru thought. It meant that they wouldn't be living together, they wouldn't talk, and they wouldn't have sex. They wouldn't be together.

"I'm not going anywhere. I'm here," Fujishima said. It seemed he saw Tohru's concern. "Even if we live apart, I'll financially support you. You don't have to worry about that."

Tohru didn't think that Fujishima would abandon him. Anyway, Tohru had the money Satoko had given him. He didn't actually need Fujishima's support anymore. But he had no intentions of saying that.

"I'll do my best to make sure you don't have to worry about anything."

Tohru didn't know what to say to turn the conversation around to him not leaving.

"We talked about you moving out before now."

Fujishima suddenly went quiet and frowned. Tohru wondered why Fujishima was bringing this up now. Even when Tohru had beaten him and forced Fujishima to perform sex acts for him, even then, Fujishima hadn't asked him to leave.

"You've met someone you like, right?"

Tohru was surprised. He looked at Fujishima. Fujishima looked like he was smiling.

"The girl last night - I've seen her coming and going," Fujishima continued.

Finally, Tohru realized who Fujishima was referring to.

"What are you talking about?"

"It was only a matter of time before you found someone. This place isn't really big enough..."

Tohru just heard this as an excuse.

"You don't need me for anything more than money now. That's why I want you to think about finding your own place. Please," Fujishima said and lowered his head. "Sorry to disturb you. Night."

Tohru ran after Fujishima and grabbed his sleeve. He pulled Fujishima back into his room.

"Why..."

He didn't know what to say. Tohru didn't feel that he could leave it like this. He was mad. Pulling Fujishima towards him, he breathed in his scent. It made Tohru's

heart beat faster. He pushed Fujishima to the bed.

"To-Tohru..."

Tohru didn't listen and got on top of him.

"Sto-stop! You don't need to do this anymore! You have a girlfriend."

Tohru pushed his hand over Fujishima's face. He needed to stop the words coming out. Then he realized - Fujishima was jealous because he thought Tohru had a girlfriend. That was the reason Fujishima was asking him to leave.

Tohru felt the organ in his pants harden. He slipped his fingers under the waistband of Fujishima's pajamas. The tips of his fingers found Fujishima's cock. He clutched it tightly.

"No! No!"

Fujishima tried to pull Tohru's hands away but to no avail. Fujishima rolled off the bed and tried to crawl away. Tohru pinned Fujishima to the floor.

"Just do as I say. I'm not going to hurt you." Tohru tried to pacify Fujishima but Fujishima was still struggling. Tohru bit Fujishima's neck.

"Ow..."

Fujishima stopped struggling for a moment. Tohru took his chance and kissed Fujishima's neck. He could feel Fujishima's muscles quiver under his tongue.

"Please... Please let me go..."

"I don't take long," Tohru whispered in Fujishima's ear. Tohru pulled his own pants down and then Fujishima's. He positioned himself.

"No... Please stop..." Fujishima yelped.

Tohru pushed himself inside Fujishima. He was



confident that Fujishima would give up then.

"Help... Help... Tohru."

Fujishima's voice was barely audible. Tohru stopped. He hadn't expected Fujishima's resistance to continue.

"To...Tohru..."

It didn't sound like Tohru's name. It sounded like Fujishima was calling for someone else.

Fujishima pulled himself out. In a second, he had fled. Tohru sat on the floor, his erection still large.

Fujishima was calling for help. He was calling for Tohru to save him. He wasn't calling for this Tohru. He didn't want this Tohru.

Tohru had thought Fujishima liked him.

Tohru stood up and punched the wall. Whatever Tohru had done, Fujishima had been there for him, so he had assumed that Fujishima was in love with him. The truth was, Fujishima had loved him.

Nobody needed Tohru, and he was terrified of that fact.

The next day Tohru waited for Fujishima to leave. As soon as he was sure that he was gone, he went into Fujishima's room. This was the first time he had been in there since he had destroyed it when Fujishima was in Izu.

The green curtains and bed sheets had been changed for white ones. It looked like an entirely different room. Fujishima must have thrown away the wrecked books

because the bookcase was bare. There were barely any decorations on the wall. The room was dreary.

Tohru approached the desk and opened the drawer. He took the Polaroids and pocket photo album and put them into a bag. He took the bag down to the apartment block's rubbish area just as the collection van came. Tohru watched the bag being crushed and driven away. The person he was for those six years had gone now. Nothing could bring the old Tohru back now.

Tohru went to work later. He was washing the dirty dishes when the bar manager called him. His boss wasn't a particularly nice man and liked complaining so Tohru prepared for another onslaught. However, instead he was told that he had a visitor at the back door. Tohru asked who it was, but the manager couldn't answer him. All he said was that it seemed urgent.

Tohru went out back to see who it was. Fujishima was standing there. He was wearing his work suit but didn't have his briefcase.

"Sorry to bother you while you're working. But I had to ask you something."

Fujishima's face was white and he could barely speak.

"You took the photos from my desk. I want them back."

Tohru frowned, "I don't know anything about them." Tohru turned around to go back to the bar, but Fujishima grabbed his arm.

"It could only have been you! Please...give them back!"

"Whatever. Don't make a fuss. They weren't your

photos anyway. I can do what I like."

Tohru shook his arm free of Fujishima. Fujishima collapsed to the ground in front of Tohru.

"Please give them back! I'm begging you..."

Fujishima was prostrated on the concrete. His forehead was almost touching the pavement. Tohru was unmoved. No matter how much Fujishima begged or groveled, it wasn't going to bring Fujishima's dirty photos back.

Other people on the sidewalk were staring at the pair of them. Tohru didn't want to cause a scene, so he thought of the quickest way to get rid of Fujishima.

"I threw them away," Tohru spat out.

"You threw them away...?"

"It was collection day today."

"You couldn't," Fujishima shook his head violently. "You couldn't have..."

"Search the apartment if you think I'm lying. You won't find them anywhere."

Fujishima didn't stay to hear any more. He started running down the street. In a few moments he was out of sight. Tohru went back to the bar and cleaned each of the plates in total silence. He couldn't concentrate for the rest of his shift. He took orders but he kept writing down the wrong thing. When the boss told him off, Tohru said he wasn't feeling well.

The manager tried to send him home early, but Tohru couldn't face the prospect of going back to the apartment. He stayed as long as he could until the manager had had enough of his mistakes. Tohru didn't relish the idea of going home early, but he had no choice.

When he returned, the entrance hall was dark and Fujishima's shoes weren't there. Tohru searched the apartment but Fujishima really had gone out. Tohru tried calling the number that Kusuda had given him last time. There was a ringing noise... Fujishima had left his cell on his desk.

Tohru couldn't work out where Fujishima would have gone. Maybe he hadn't come home after he had visited Tohru at the bar. After all, he hadn't said a word when Tohru had trashed his room and broken his computer. He had asked about those photos, though. He'd even turned up at Tohru's work to ask him. That should give him a clue...

"Shit..." Tohru shouted, and ran out of the apartment. He didn't know where Fujishima was, but he was still going to look.

He ran down streets he had never been down before and checked all the side streets. Tohru ran until he was exhausted. When he stopped for breath, he found himself standing outside the park near the apartment building. Tohru still hadn't found Fujishima. Tohru walked dejectedly through the park. He was tired from all the running. The clock in the middle of the park said that it was two o'clock. Of course, there was no one in the park.

Tohru's feet treaded through the dry leaves. The breeze had the bitter cold of autumn. Tohru was sweaty and it made him feel colder. He had walked through most of the park when he heard a rustling sound to the right of him. There was someone by the kid's playground. The shadow was so small that it looked like a child.

Tohru slowly approached the swing. Fujishima was sitting on the seat. Fujishima was swaying back and forth slightly making the swing creak.

Tohru was standing right in front of Fujishima, but Fujishima didn't look up. He must have known Tohru was standing there but he said nothing.

"Go home..." Fujishima finally muttered. It chilled Tohru more than the wind. "I'll be back later. I just want to be alone."

Tohru grabbed Fujishima's arms and forced him to stand up. Fujishima refused to cooperate. After a short scuffle, Fujishima ended up sitting on the ground. Tohru grabbed him by the nape of the neck and tried to drag him back to the apartment. Fujishima's body was totally floppy, though. It wasn't going to work. Tohru stepped back for a moment and Fujishima took his chance to escape.

If Fujishima ran away now, Tohru thought he might not be able to find him again. Tohru chased Fujishima with all his strength. Fujishima fled in the direction of the jungle gym. No matter how much Tohru chased him, Fujishima managed to keep his distance ahead. Tohru couldn't catch up with him.

After a while Fujishima gave up running. Tohru approached him but he didn't move. Tohru grabbed his arms so he couldn't move.

Tohru yanked him over to a tree and pushed him up against it.

Tohru pulled Fujishima's tie off and ripped his shirt open. Fujishima did nothing to stop it. Tohru yanked his pants down and spread Fujishima's legs. Fujishima

didn't resist like he did the day before.

Tohru pushed himself into Fujishima. He heard Fujishima swallow but there was no discernable noise. Instead, Fujishima put his hands over his eyes but kept his lips tight shut.

"Feels good, right?"

Tohru thrust himself further inside Fujishima. He started rocking back and forth.

"I know you like this, because you like me."

Tohru wasn't sure if he was talking to himself. He didn't need an answer anyway.

"I know you love having sex with me. You like sucking me off."

From between the cracks in Fujishima's fingers, he could see tears.

"How did we used to do it? What position do you like? We can do it that way? Do you like being on top? Or do you like being taken from behind?"

Tohru tweaked Fujishima's nipples.

"I know you like this. Do you like me to be strong or gentle?"

Fujishima didn't answer.

"What about here?"

The tension was rising in Tohru's voice. He changed his angle a little and could feel his penis react.

"Why aren't you talking?! I'm trying to make you happy! Tell me! Say something!" Tohru started screaming.

Suddenly he had climaxed. When he pulled out, semen oozed from Fujishima's hole. Fujishima quietly closed his legs now that it was over. Tohru grabbed

Fujishima's limp penis and started to suck. Slowly Fujishima's penis started to rise. Tohru sucked down the entire length of Fujishima's shaft. He sucked hard and fast. Fujishima came. Tohru swallowed.

"I want to please you."

Fujishima was still hiding.

"I'm good, right? You liked that?"

Fujishima started to shake his head, at first slowly but then violently.

"What the hell! That must have felt good. You were hard, weren't you? Why the hell are you shaking your head?!"

"Sex with you doesn't feel good. But if that's what you want, I'll do it."

The wind blew. It was cold. Fujishima wouldn't look at him. Tohru realized that Fujishima couldn't look at him.

Fujishima didn't like the person he was now. He liked the person he was before. He liked the nice Tohru Takahisa who he was for six years. The Tohru who made cakes and was loved by everyone.

Everyone had drawn a line between the man he had been for six years and the man he was now. Fujishima had been the only one not to do that. Tohru had assumed that Fujishima didn't care that he was this man now. But perhaps Fujishima had been the one who missed how it used to be more than anyone else.

He was here, but what did that mean. Why had his memories come back? If he was so happy and so loved, why did he have to live like this now? Why did he have to feel this way?

Tohru clenched his teeth. As a child everyone hated him. But what had he done? Why had his mother abandoned him? Why was he taken in by people he wasn't related to? Why did the one person he had trusted betray him over and over again?

He wished that everyone would just die.

There was the shuffling of clothes. Fujishima was picking up his discarded clothes. Fujishima was composed. He was acting as if nothing happened.

Fujishima turned around and started to walk away. He didn't ask Tohru if he wanted to come with him.

Tohru chased after him. He grabbed Fujishima's hair and pulled him back.

"Argh!"

From Tohru's clenched teeth came primal groans. They meant nothing.

He didn't know how to express himself. He felt all these emotions crushing him. The only thing that had been certain was this man.

Tohru released Fujishima's hair. His hand was quivering.

"Aaaaaaarghh!" Tohru screamed. He buried his head in his hands. The sound of his screams reverberated in his skull.

"Aaarrgh! Aaaargh!"

Tohru kept screaming until his throat was dry. The screams started to turn into sobs.

He couldn't scream anymore. He sounded like an engine that had run out of steam. His cheeks were red hot from the exertion and he could feel tears roll down one by one.

He opened his mouth but the screams wouldn't come out anymore. His emotions had nowhere to go. He buried his face into Fujishima's chest.

Tohru felt wretched. He couldn't see an end to the tears. He couldn't see an end to the despair. He couldn't see the light at the end of the tunnel.

Finally, the tears stopped flowing. His body had run out. It had given up. All that was left was an empty shell of flesh. Tohru wanted to die. If no one needed him or wanted him, he wanted to die.

Tohru grabbed Fujishima's neck tie and started to wrap it around his neck. He made a knot and pulled tight. He choked and then he pulled again. His body reflexively stopped him but he kept trying.

On the seventh attempt he gave up. Maybe Fujishima would put him out of his misery? He placed the end of the tie in Fujishima's hand. He closed his eyes and waited for the end.

The end didn't come... He felt the tips of someone's fingers. He opened his eyes. Fujishima was mopping up the tears. Tohru was scared, so scared. Slowly Fujishima's fingers made their way down to his throat where he could still feel the burn from trying to choke himself.

Tohru grabbed at Fujishima's wrist. Without thinking, he bit one of Fujishima's fingers. Fujishima pulled back, startled. Blood seeped from the teeth marks Tohru had left behind. Fujishima ignored it and stroked Tohru's face again.

Tohru was shivering. It was so cold. He felt happy though. He felt genuine happiness.

He knew that there could be more hard times

ahead. The person Fujishima loved was not him. It was, but was not. As long as Fujishima was here, Tohru was going to be jealous of the man that Fujishima fell in love with.

He grabbed Fujishima's wrist.

"I'm not going to hit you. I'm not going to make you have sex," Tohru said. Fujishima looked up. "I won't do anything you don't want."

Fujishima stared up at him.

"Wh-whatever happens, I will be by your side."

Tohru felt his chest tighten. He couldn't fathom what was going on anymore, but he knew what he was doing.

"Let's go on a trip. You liked traveling. I'll take you somewhere."

Tohru's throat was dry but he had to make this right.

"What about cakes. I'll make cakes. I'll get a book and make some of the easy ones. I'll make chocolate cakes, cream cakes anything."

Fujishima shook his head gently. Tohru's eyes went black at the rejection of his urgent proposal.

"Don't just shake your head to everything I say!" Tohru's lips were trembling now.

"That's not it... That's not it..."

"You don't like me! I have to be the person I was before. The person I was for six years. Otherwise you won't stay with me."

Tohru grabbed Fujishima's arms and pulled him up. He hugged Fujishima so tight he might break. Tohru was so sad. He needed to hold Fujishima. He needed to touch him. Fujishima looked at Tohru. He only looked at

Tohru. Tohru lowered his head and kissed him. The soft touch of Fujishima's lips and tongue.

"I'm here," Fujishima whispered. "I'm here..."

Tohru pulled Fujishima even closer.

"I won't go anywhere."

Fujishima's voice quivered.

"Do you promise?" Tohru asked.

Fujishima nodded.

"You won't go away and leave me?"

Tohru couldn't help repeating himself. He needed to check that he wasn't dreaming. Each time he asked, Fujishima replied with yes. All the unease and bad feelings Tohru had started to have slipped away.

"I don't want to be alone anymore..."

Tohru realized that his life had worth when he was with this kind, gentle man.

It was a Saturday at the end of December. It was midday but Tohru was still in bed. Fujishima was sleeping next to him. He had tried to get up once, but Tohru had pulled him back into bed with him.

With a little yawn, Fujishima had closed his eyes. He'd buried his face into Tohru's chest.

Every Saturday for a month they'd spent in bed naked. Tohru couldn't stand to be without Fujishima's warmth. Even when Fujishima went to the bathroom, Tohru would stand at the door. Tohru knew that he was acting weird, but Fujishima didn't say a thing about it.

Tohru had to bear it when he was at school and



Fujishima was at work, but Tohru would phone Fujishima every hour. Tohru bought a cell phone for himself just so he could hear Fujishima's voice. When they were home, they spent every minute together being intimate. They hadn't just done it in the bedrooms but done it more than once or twice in the kitchen and living room. Fujishima didn't spend much time with his clothes on when they were at home. Clothes just got in the way and Tohru liked to be able to reach out and touch Fujishima whenever he liked.

Tohru was just like a newborn. He would cry for his mother whenever he thought she wasn't around. The whole situation was unlike him, but he felt happy.

"It's good weather today," Fujishima said, looking at the sunlight coming through the window when he drew the curtains. Tohru also looked at the bright light.

Suddenly he wanted to go out. It was the first time Tohru had felt this way in weeks.

"The sea..." Tohru whispered. He didn't really have a reason. He just wanted to go to the sea. Tohru had seen it in movies, but he wanted to see the real thing. He'd always lived inland, and he had never had anyone to go to the seaside with.

"The sea?" Fujishima cocked his head to the side.

"No reason..." Tohru buried his face in Fujishima's soft chest and breathed in his scent.

"Do you want to go?"

Tohru stroked Fujishima's hair.

"Do you want to go together?"

Fujishima looked up at Tohru. Tohru felt like Fujishima could see right through him.

Fujishima asked him if he wanted to go again.

The sun was shining, but there was still a cool breeze. The sky was clear blue and the sea had a grayish tint to it. They were winter colors. Fujishima was wearing his black coat with a wine colored scarf. The wind threw his hair around.

After they had decided to go to the sea, Tohru wanted to take photos. Tohru hadn't picked his camera up much outside of class time recently. With his camera and tripod in hand, he had ridden in the back of Fujishima's car.

They had driven south for an hour before they saw the glittering line on the horizon. Tohru felt excited like a child. Fujishima parked the car, and together they had descended the concrete steps down to the beach. The feeling of sand in his shoes was new. Tohru just wanted to take as many steps as possible.

Tohru set his tripod up near the waves and set his camera. He looked through the finder at the sea coming and going. There was nothing unusual about the sea that day, but every photograph Tohru took seemed etched in drama. It was exactly what he had hoped.

Suddenly a powerful wave soaked his feet. Tohru picked up his tripod and turned around.

Fujishima was gone. Just a few moments ago he'd been sitting on the sand, but now Tohru couldn't see him. Tohru dropped the camera and ran back up to the car. Fujishima wasn't there either.

Tohru desperately searched. He ran down the shore. He looked in people's gardens. He ran back to where the car was, and finally he saw someone on the other side of the street.

Fujishima crossed the street and smiled at Tohru.

"Where did you go?" Tohru screamed. The desperation was evident in his voice.

"Sorry," Fujishima said and offered him a coffee. "It's cold..."

Tohru grabbed the coffee cup and threw it at the sea wall. He grabbed Fujishima's hand and dragged him back down to the beach. His abandoned camera was half covered in sand. Tohru retrieved it. Tohru began to regret that they had come to the sea. He wished they had just stayed in bed.

"Are we going home?" Fujishima asked as Tohru started to climb the steps again. "I want to stay here longer."

Fujishima yanked his hand back that was still in Tohru's grip. This just made Tohru want to go home even more, but Fujishima wanted to stay. Tohru stood still.

He stood and stared at the ocean. He was still struggling with his temper. Tohru had been so frightened when he couldn't see Fujishima. He thought that Fujishima had abandoned him. Tohru realized that no matter how much they slept together, and the promises that were made, he still didn't trust Fujishima. The reason he didn't trust Fujishima was that he had no confidence in himself.

To try and calm himself, he took his packet of cigarettes from his top pocket. The wind was too strong

for him to light it. That made him angrier.

"I need a lighter." Tohru asked.

Fujishima didn't smoke. It was a stupid question to ask. Tohru noticed that Fujishima was reaching into his pocket for something. Fujishima pulled out a photo and a lighter.

Fujishima didn't show Tohru the photo. He lit it. The unique smell of plastic filled Tohru's nose.

The two men watched the photo burn. Before the fire reached Fujishima's fingers, he dropped it. The bright red flecks of paper were picked up by the wind and danced across the sand.

"There was only one photo left..."

Tohru didn't need to ask what the photo was.

"I'm not going anywhere," Fujishima whispered.

"I'm not going to leave you."

Fujishima turned to Tohru and looked him straight in the eye.

"I'm not leaving you. I want to be with you."

Tohru shook his head. A tear dripped onto the sand and disappeared. Tohru told himself that it was the smoke making him cry.

END

Last Fever - One Year

Winter

As soon as he left the station, a cold breeze hit his face. An elderly man next to him shivered and pulled the collar up on his coat. Keishi Fujishima shivered a little and picked up his pace.

It was after seven-thirty and most of the shops around the station were already closed. Fujishima stopped in front of the bakery. There weren't that many cakes left, probably because of the time of day.

He met the eyes of a girl who worked there. Fujishima hurried away. It had been a year since he had visited Port. It seemed so long ago that he ate their cakes almost every day.

He wondered what would have happened if Tohru's memories hadn't returned. Would he be running the bakery? He stopped himself. Tohru's memories had returned. Fujishima knew he shouldn't dwell on the past.

Fujishima buried his face deeper into his scarf. He left the shopping area and headed to the nearby park. During the summer the benches would be full of chatting couples, but not so many people were here in December.

It took ten minutes for Fujishima to return to

the apartment building. When he opened the door, the entrance hall light was on and Tohru's sneakers were on the floor. The heating was running and it felt very warm and comfortable inside. Fujishima kept his coat on and looked inside the living room. Tohru wasn't there.

Fujishima retreated to his own room and changed out of his shirt and into a dark sweater. He then went to look in the kitchen. Tohru wasn't there either. Fujishima opened the fridge. It didn't look like Tohru had made anything. His shoes were here, so he must be in. The only place left was Tohru's bedroom. Fujishima wondered if something was wrong. He regretted not picking up dinner for the two of them.

For the past three weeks, Tohru had been making breakfast and dinner without fail. One morning when Fujishima woke up, Tohru hadn't been by his side. At first Fujishima thought that Tohru had gotten up to wash and would be back soon. However, when Tohru didn't come back for five or ten minutes, Fujishima began to wonder what was going on. Opening his bedroom door, his nose had been hit by the smell of frying. Fujishima walked through the living room to the kitchen. Standing in front of the stove was Tohru with the frying pan. Fujishima couldn't believe his eyes.

That morning they ate burnt toast and rubbery eggs. Fujishima was filled with a strange feeling as he sat and ate the breakfast Tohru had made.

Tohru had been a great cook before he lost his memories. He would always make breakfast and dinner. However, when Tohru regained his memories he stopped cooking. The most that Fujishima had seen him do was

boil some water. He hadn't even seen him with a knife in his hand.

Fujishima had wanted to ask why the change of heart, but there was something about the way Tohru was acting that morning that stopped Fujishima from asking. Before Fujishima headed out for work that morning, he had thanked Tohru. Tohru hadn't replied.

Even after Fujishima had gone to work, he wondered why Tohru had suddenly made breakfast. Nothing strange happened that evening... But Tohru had asked Fujishima what he liked. Fujishima hadn't understood what Tohru was asking at first, until an irritated Tohru clarified that he was asking about his favorite food.

Fujishima's favorite food was cake. Now that Tohru's amnesia was gone, he didn't know Fujishima's favorite food.

"Cake!" Fujishima had exclaimed. But as soon as he said it, he felt a little ashamed at his childish behavior. To be honest, he didn't take much interest in food. But he had to say something, so he answered that he liked the bento boxes from the convenience store.

Tohru wasn't happy with that answer.

That evening, just as Fujishima was finishing work, his cell rang. It was Tohru. Tohru said that Fujishima didn't need to buy dinner that evening. He said that he had plans and hung up. Fujishima assumed that he would be eating dinner with his friend, Kusuda, so he was surprised when he got home to find Tohru cooking dinner.

Tohru made a curry and a large salad. The curry

was a little too spicy and Fujishima had to down several glasses of water to finish his serving. He still thought it was the most delicious curry he'd ever had because Tohru cooked it. Fujishima was so happy.

Tohru had asked Fujishima why he was grinning. Fujishima thought that it was obvious.

The next morning and the day after, Tohru had cooked. At first Fujishima had been surprised but then it became normal. That was why he was surprised that Tohru wasn't making dinner tonight.

Fujishima put his wallet in his pocket and went out to buy dinner. He bought two bento boxes from the convenience store. On the way home he wondered if Tohru was busy with his studies. Fujishima didn't know what his schedule was like, but figured that there must be tests and projects to submit.

Fujishima came back to the apartment with the bento boxes. Tohru still hadn't come out of his room. It had been a while since Tohru had locked himself in his room, so it seemed lonely now he wasn't here.

Tohru had been very needy at first. He would get anxious if Fujishima didn't make love with him or touch him. Some days Tohru would pounce on him as soon as he got in from work and they would have sex in the hall. In fact, they had made love in every room of the apartment now.

A few weeks ago, they had enjoyed some *al fresco* sex, and Fujishima had caught a cold. He had stayed at home for two days with a fever. Tohru hadn't left his side once. After Fujishima had gotten better, Tohru hadn't demanded sex in odd places again.

Fujishima put the bento boxes in the living room. He waited thirty minutes, but when Tohru still hadn't emerged, he stood up. He went to Tohru's room and knocked on the door.

"Tohru..."

No answer. He wondered if Tohru had fallen asleep when he got home. He gently turned the door knob but he was greeted by a shout.

"DON'T COME IN!"

"So-sorry," Fujishima gasped. He was surprised.

Tohru hadn't shouted much recently, and it scared Fujishima.

"I got bento boxes. I thought you might be hungry."

There was no answer. "Did you eat already?"

Fujishima pushed his ear to the door, desperate to hear an answer.

"I'm fine. Leave me alone."

Fujishima thought he heard a hacking cough from the other side of the door. Fujishima was full of doubt. Without hesitation he opened the door.

"I told you not to come in!"

Fujishima turned the light on. Tohru was wrapped up in his bed covers, shivering.

Fujishima went to his side but Tohru pulled the quilt over his head.

"How long have you not been feeling well?"

Tohru wouldn't answer. On his bedside table was a thermometer and cough medicine.

"Is there anything you could eat? I'll fetch it for you."

"I'm fine. Get out," Tohru said, head still covered

by the blanket. "I just need rest. Get out. Get out..."

Tohru finished his sentence with a series of hacking coughs.

"Get out..." Each time Tohru spoke he had less and less strength. "I don't want you to catch this."

"It's okay."

"It's not okay."

The blankets moved and Tohru's face emerged.

"You're so thin and weak. You need to be careful. I'll be fine."

Fujishima lingered. He didn't want to leave his lover unwell.

"You'll be so ill if you catch this! I've been so careful. I ate lots of vegetables and I still got sick! Think what this will do to your fragile body!"

Tohru looked like he was about to fall into floods of tears, but he pulled the blankets over his head. Fujishima felt a little sad as he watched Tohru's shadow under the blanket.

Fujishima didn't want to leave him. He wanted to stay with him until morning. He wanted to sleep next to him. He wanted to keep him warm. Fujishima wasn't sure what he should do. Tohru didn't want him there.

Fujishima stood up and took off his sweater and pants. He took off his underwear and stood by Tohru's bed completely naked. Tohru was sneaking a peek from under the sheets but Fujishima could see his surprise.

"What the hell are you doing?"

"I'm waiting for you to let me in."

"You'll catch a cold standing there naked like that."

Tohru threw his covers over Fujishima.

"Get your clothes on. Don't be an idiot."

Fujishima ignored him. He lay down in the bed and hugged Tohru. He pulled the covers around both of them and tucked them in.

Fujishima could feel Tohru's muscles start to relax.

Fujishima spent a lot of time thinking through that cold night. He wondered how many times he would fall in love with this man. He had fallen in love with Tohru when he had amnesia. He had fallen in love with the Tohru he was now. They were both different, but he loved them both.

"...Warm..." Tohru whispered. Fujishima was so happy that he was keeping Tohru warm. He stroked the head that was buried in his chest.

Whatever he could do for Tohru made him happy. He wanted Tohru to understand that.

Spring

The glass in the window rattled, stirring Fujishima. He reached to his right, but the body he was looking for wasn't there. Fujishima's eyes glanced over the dark room and he saw that Tohru was looking out the window completely naked.

There had been strong winds since midday, but now that the town was silent, Fujishima could hear them even more. It might cause chaos for the cherry blossom parties.

Fujishima stared at Tohru. Tohru finally returned to bed. He held Fujishima, but Fujishima felt that Tohru's mind was somewhere else.

Tohru was restless and couldn't settle. In the end, he got up and turned on the light.

"Are you tired?"

He looked at the clock. It was two-thirty in the morning.

"A little."

"I have the day off work tomorrow."

Fujishima nodded.

"Let's go out. Put on your clothes."

"Where are we going?"

No answer. Fujishima obediently changed his clothes. He didn't ask again where they would be going in the middle of the night. He was about to leave in his jeans and a thin sweater. Tohru threw a jacket over his shoulders. Tohru walked out in just a T-shirt.

Before they left the apartment building, Tohru grabbed Fujishima's right hand and clenched it tightly. They walked through the park and passed by the shopping center. They took a street that Fujishima had never been down before. At the end they reached some old flood defenses by the river.

Tohru stopped. They were under some tall cherry blossom trees by the river. In the light of the wooden street lamps, the white-pink blossoms looked glorious.

"They're so beautiful. I wanted you to see them," Tohru muttered. "But I was worried that they would fall..."

A strong breeze blew past, taking some of the

white petals with it in the dark. Fujishima looked down at his feet and saw the petals blowing across the concrete. They made a surprising noise for being so delicate.

"You hear it?" Fujishima looked up at Tohru. "I didn't know petals made a noise."

Tohru didn't say anything. Silently he picked off the petals that had landed on Fujishima's head one by one.

He indicated that Fujishima should sit on the flood defenses. Tohru looked up at the tree. Fujishima looked at the scene. It was beautiful.

A falling petal touched his lips.

Tohru brushed the petal from Fujishima's lips.

Tohru placed the petal on his tongue and swallowed. For some reason Fujishima felt embarrassed and bowed his head. The petals were still making that sweet rustling underfoot.

"Can we come here next year?" Tohru asked. Fujishima slowly nodded.

Next year and the year after... Fujishima wanted to tell him that he would go wherever Tohru went.

Looking over at the man next to him, Fujishima felt this was the happiest night of his life.

Summer

All the windows were wide open in the apartment.

Tohru didn't try to turn the air conditioning on.

The air conditioning hurt Fujishima's throat so Tohru had forbidden it. It was hot, so when they were reading, sleeping and making love, they had the window open.

Fujishima had come to really appreciate the beauty of moonlight.

One night there was a thin covering of cloud over the moon. Tohru hugged Fujishima. It felt warm and comfortable. No matter how often he felt Fujishima's naked skin against his, he got excited.

Tohru's large hands pulled on his pajama shirt. Tohru tweaked Fujishima's hard nipples. Fujishima's breath had started to deepen. Tohru pulled Fujishima's sweat pants down. Fujishima kicked the discarded clothes to one side.

In the moonlight he was completely naked. Tohru stroked him all the way down his back, fastidiously ignoring Fujishima's penis. It made Fujishima feel anxious with anticipation of what was coming. The other Tohru had been so happy to make Fujishima happy. He wondered what the new Tohru was thinking. Sometimes he wasn't sure how he should act.

Tohru grabbed Fujishima's wrist and pulled him out into the hall. Fujishima stumbled a little, but Tohru didn't seem to notice.

Fujishima wondered if Tohru wanted to take some pictures and that was why he was being led here. During spring vacation Tohru had turned his room into a studio. He had thrown away his bed and bookshelves. He had fitted a shutter over the window to block out all the light. When Tohru was cleaning up, he had given the books he had owned during his six years of amnesia to Fujishima.

He had told Fujishima to do what he liked with them. Fujishima had thrown them all away. It wasn't that Fujishima didn't want to keep them, but he thought that it would upset Tohru so he decided to discard them.

On the white wall was a large light. In his studio Tohru would take pictures of pebbles he had collected from the side of the street and on the path. Most of the rocks that Tohru collected were smooth and weathered by water. Tohru had shown Fujishima some of the photos. It was amazing how Tohru had made rocks, which didn't appear to have any meaning on the surface, to look like they were crying.

Tohru made Fujishima stand in front of the white wall. He shone the light on Fujishima. Fujishima felt the heat from it.

"Are you going to take a picture of me?"

"Yes," Tohru said as he adjusted the light.

"Like this?"

Fujishima was still completely naked. Tohru nodded.

"Like that."

Tohru took out his tripod and set up his camera. Standing in front of the wall alone, Fujishima suddenly felt lonely. Tohru didn't say a word as he took several photos.

Tohru looked over the top of the camera.

"Can you smile?" Tohru asked.

Fujishima smiled because Tohru told him to. Fujishima didn't really know what there was to smile about, but he forced himself to. He knew that his smile was unnatural. The shutter sounds stopped. Fujishima squatted.

"What's the matter?" Fujishima asked.

He could see Tohru's feet approaching him.

"Is something wrong?"

"I didn't think you wouldn't like it. I'm sorry."

Fujishima could hear the sadness in Tohru's voice and he regretted his own feelings.

"No, it's fine... It's just..."

"Is it because of that?"

Fujishima blushed. Tohru was talking about his penis. Before the impromptu photo shoot Fujishima had had an erection, but he had lost it soon after. Tohru crouched down by Fujishima and fingered his lover's penis.

"I like it like this."

Fujishima's penis leaked a little.

"It's what I lust after."

Tohru gently caressed Fujishima's manhood and it slowly regained its erection.

"I thought that you wouldn't like it," Fujishima whispered.

Tohru muttered something. Fujishima couldn't hear it. He was going to ask again but Tohru had taken the opportunity to steal a kiss.

Tohru pushed Fujishima against the wall. In the dim light of the moon, they made passionate love.

After their lovemaking, they were both naked and sweaty. Tohru left Fujishima lying on the floor with nothing to hide his modesty. Tohru moved the camera closer. Fujishima held his own member in his hand. He hadn't used a condom so there was some mess. Fujishima stood up to go to the bathroom and clean up, but Tohru

stopped him. Tohru kissed Fujishima's sweaty forehead. He tweaked Fujishima's sensitive nipples. Fujishima shuddered a little.

"You like me playing with them."

"I know, but leave me."

Fujishima was still holding his limp penis.

"Otherwise...."

"It's just me."

"But it's sexy. You're making me hard," Tohru said. He hugged Fujishima and then moved him to one side. Tohru adjusted the camera to take his shot.

Fujishima was shocked and tried to close his legs, but Tohru didn't want that.

"No!"

Tohru bent down and kissed Fujishima, and then spread Fujishima's legs. He took the photo. All Fujishima could hear was the sound of the camera shutter.

"...Photos..."

Fujishima looked up at Tohru.

"I took some photos."

"What do you want to do with those photos?"

"I just wanted to take pictures of your body."

"But..."

"I was naked too. You let the other me take pictures of you naked."

Fujishima didn't have a counter argument to that.

"You look different in the moonlight."

Tohru stroked Fujishima's sweaty body.

"Your skin is so tight and smooth. I just wanted to capture it in a photograph. I'm not good at taking photos of people or nudes, but I wanted to do this. I wanted to

leave something behind."

Tohru hugged Fujishima close. Fujishima shut his eyes.

"I want to take lots more like this. I want to take pictures of you angry, thoughtful, and tearful. That way, when you're not here, I can look at them and feel safe."

Fujishima looked at the camera. It was like a third eye for Tohru. He used to be scared, but he wasn't scared any longer. There was nothing to be scared of.

"Do you promise not to show anyone?" Fujishima looked at Tohru intently. "You mustn't show the photos to anyone else. If you promise that, I'll let you."

Tohru promised and they kissed. But Fujishima felt that he didn't need a promise, he knew that Tohru wouldn't show the pictures to anyone else.

Autumn

Fujishima met Kusuda in a coffee shop near the station close to his work. He looked out the window. The sun was setting early, he thought. It was getting dark soon after five-thirty. By six o'clock everything was pitch black. The mornings and evenings were cold, and the people on the street were all wearing their winter coats.

Fujishima had called Tohru to say that he had to do overtime, so he was going to be an hour late. He didn't tell him he was meeting Kusuda because Kusuda had asked him to keep it a secret.

Kusuda arrived later than he promised. Kusuda wouldn't tell him over the phone, so Fujishima was sure that it must be about Tohru.

"Sorry that I'm late," Kusuda interrupted Fujishima's thoughts.

When Fujishima had known Kusuda before, Kusuda had always been very smart and well-dressed. He seemed more relaxed now. His hair was longer and he was wearing a different suit. What really drew Fujishima's attention was the large necklace and ring. Oversized accessories usually looked ridiculous, but they suited Kusuda. Perhaps it was because of the suit he was wearing.

"Do you have the day off today?" Fujishima asked.

"No..." Kusuda replied, and shook his head. "I'm on my way home. I haven't had much time off since I set up a company with my brother last year."

"A company?" Fujishima was surprised.

"Huh?" Kusuda cocked his head. "I thought Tohru would have told you? I quit my job last year to set up a jewelry company."

Fujishima and Tohru had been intimate every day. However, they hadn't spoken much.

"My brother made this necklace and ring. They're pretty unusual, right?"

The design was a snake and a flower entwined. Fujishima didn't know much about jewelry, but he was impressed.

"They're beautiful."

"I have lots more work than in my old job, but

it's so interesting. It gives my life purpose. It's a small office so I have a lot of freedom. We have plans to do a collaboration with one of my brother's friends who owns a perfume brand." Kusuda stopped for a moment and sighed. "But... Because it's a small company... Budget is always a problem..."

Kusuda looked up at Fujishima.

"I asked Tohru if he would take a photo for a marketing poster."

"Really?" This was the first Fujishima had heard of this.

"Tohru showed us some sample pictures so we could decide on a direction." Kusuda took a deep breath. "I'm sorry, but I need you to persuade Tohru."

"Persuade him?"

Fujishima really didn't know where the conversation was going.

"Out of all the photos Tohru showed us, there was one that my brother really liked. However, he said that he'd made a mistake and it shouldn't have been included. He asked us to give it back. My brother only wants that photo on the campaign now... It's a massive headache..."

"What was the photo?"

Kusuda took a transparent file from his bag.

"I gave the original back to Tohru but I have a copy. Our graphic designer has added the products and slogan. Please don't tell Tohru we made a copy."

Fujishima opened the file. As soon as he saw the contents, his heart skipped a beat. It was a copy of two men in the nude. One was standing in front of the other.

The one in behind was hugging the one in front. The words "LOVE & HATE" had been added to the front, and in the right corner was a photo of a perfume bottle and a necklace.

"The theme of the collaboration is love and hate. Don't you think it works so well? I would really like to use this photo."

The faces of the two men were in shadow, but Fujishima thought that the man in the back looked a lot like Tohru. The man in front had to be him. Tohru had taken lots of photos of them nude, so Fujishima couldn't tell when the picture had been taken.

Fujishima stared at the file...

"You're not happy?" Kusuda broke the silence. "This is you and Tohru, right? Your faces aren't visible but I knew right away."

Fujishima started to sweat a little. He felt embarrassed.

"I know that you wouldn't want to upset Tohru, but I really want to use this picture. You can't see the faces and the female staff in the office thought that the man in front was a girl."

Kusuda's face suddenly went red and he looked flustered.

"I didn't mean that you're feminine. Just that this picture... I think this image transcends gender boundaries. It's exactly what we wanted."

Fujishima didn't say anything. "If you don't want me to use it, I'll leave it. But if you don't mind, please talk to Tohru."

Kusuda lowered his head.

"Don't tell him what I said to you... Please."

Kusuda was so sincere in his request, Fujishima couldn't say no. He promised to talk to Tohru and left.

Fujishima thought hard on the train ride home. Fujishima would never have imagined that one of their secret photos might end up in someone's hands and that they would want to publish it. Fujishima felt ashamed and didn't want it to be published.

When he got home, he waited for Tohru to return. As they ate dinner, Fujishima replayed what Kusuda had said in his head over and over.

"Tohru."

Tohru looked up.

"Can I see your photos after this?"

Tohru thought about this request for a moment.

"Which ones?" Tohru asked.

"I'll tell you later..."

After dinner, Tohru brought out four photo albums and handed them to Fujishima. They were all pictures of stones. There were no nude shots of them. They had taken several pictures of them together, but Fujishima hadn't actually ever seen any of them nor asked to see them.

He returned the albums to Tohru.

"Could I see the ones of us?"

Tohru nodded. He went to his room and brought out three files. Fujishima opened one, but slammed it shut as soon as he saw the first picture. It was one of him and Tohru kissing.

"I thought you wanted to see them?"

Tohru looked over at Fujishima curiously.

"Yes... I do..."

Fujishima reopened the file, but with his eyes tightly shut.

"Look! Look how beautiful you are."

Fujishima opened his eyes a little. But the photos were the same. He felt a wave of shame. Tohru flicked through the pages for him. Fujishima was horrified. In one of the pictures Tohru was sitting behind him and Fujishima had his legs spread. You could see the whole of his erection. It looked like Tohru was penetrating him from behind.

Fujishima turned the page. The next file was the same position but Tohru was tweaking his nipples. Fujishima's mouth was open a little. Fujishima flicked through three pages before he couldn't look anymore.

"Do you not want to see any more?"

Truth be told, Fujishima couldn't look any more.

"No..."

He had been so ashamed seeing himself in the pictures like that. He had a desperate urge to wash his face that was now bright red. Tohru forced him back onto the sofa when he tried to get up.

"Let's look together," he invited.

Fujishima had always found it hard to resist Tohru, and he relaxed. Tohru smiled. As Tohru went through the pages, he gave a commentary on each one.

"Look at this one. This isn't sexy. This is ethereal and beautiful. Its length... Grasped by my right hand..."

Fujishima couldn't agree with Tohru. He didn't think it was beautiful.

"The color of your nipples really jumps out. You

are always very pale, but when you're aroused, they go bright red. I like them when they're that color."

Fujishima didn't have to see the photos themselves. Just hearing Tohru talk about them was enough to make him blush. Tohru wasn't going to stop the torment, though.

"This is my favorite." Tohru turned to the final page.

It was a photo of Fujishima's top half. He stood in a shaft of light and he was smiling. It wasn't a forced smile. It was completely natural.

"You have such a photogenic face. I love the way the light highlights your smile."

Fujishima nodded.

"It's like I'm in a shaft of moonlight," he said.

"That's what I was going for," Tohru replied, and pulled Fujishima close. Fujishima felt the embarrassment start to slip away and he began relaxing into the activity.

"Let's look at more," Tohru said, as he picked up the final file.

Each photo was powerful. Fujishima couldn't look away. Each photo captured a special moment.

In this third file was the photo that Kusuda had showed him. Fujishima stopped and re-examined it.

"Do you like this one," Tohru asked. He must have noticed that Fujishima had hesitated on one. "I don't like this one. It was when we first started taking pictures naked. You're too tense in front of the camera. You look like you're going to cry. I don't like it."

Fujishima stared at the photo some more. Without

thinking he muttered the words, 'love and hate.'

"What did you just say," Tohru demanded. Fujishima cursed himself. "How do you know about that?!"

Fujishima really regretted his carelessness. He had uttered the exact theme of the marketing campaign Tohru was supposed to be working on. He couldn't make it out to be a coincidence. His timing was terrible. Fujishima decided that he shouldn't try to hide his intentions. He decided to be straight with Tohru.

"I spoke to Kusuda. He told me that he wanted to use this photo in a campaign..."

Tohru jumped from the sofa in a rage. Fujishima started up and grabbed him. Tohru was so upset that Fujishima was afraid he would run straight to Kusuda's.

"It's all right... You should let him use it. No one can see who we are."

Tohru swung round. He looked just like a child.

"What did you say?"

"Huh..."

"You told me not to show anyone those pictures!"

Fujishima had said that. But he had forgotten.

"I know, but just this once. No one can see our faces."

Tohru pursed his lips and frowned.

"We all like the photo. Me, Kusuda, and Kusuda's brother."

Tohru didn't answer. Fujishima would normally have been embarrassed, but for some reason once he heard Tohru talk about the photos, he felt differently.

"I don't like it," Tohru stated. "I don't want it

used.”

Fujishima realized that Tohru was mad because he had forgotten the promise he had made Tohru make to him.

“I’m sorry that I forgot what I said. But it would be helping Kusuda...”

“I...” Tohru slammed his fist into the wall. “I don’t want anyone else to see you naked!”

Fujishima blinked. He couldn’t say anything. He nodded.

“It’s not that big an issue...”

“That’s not the problem! I don’t want anyone else to see you naked. Those photos are just for me!”

Finally, Fujishima understood what Tohru didn’t like about the suggestion.

“I...see...”

“How can you not care?!” Tohru screamed.

Fujishima desperately tried to find words for his thoughts.

“I don’t know how to say this... But I’m only going to take my clothes off in front of you. You’re the only one who will take the pictures.” Fujishima stopped for a moment before continuing. “So one photo doesn’t matter.”

Suddenly Tohru smiled. It was a sweet smile. After a moment, he turned around and walked away.

A week later Fujishima got a call from Kusuda. He wanted to tell Fujishima that Tohru had agreed to allow the photo to be used. Apparently he had hit Kusuda. Kusuda joked that Tohru still didn’t understand the word sorry.

Spring

Fujishima was late finishing work, so he headed straight to the station and didn’t go home. The day was hot and he could feel beads of sweat rolling down his back.

Fujishima suddenly stopped in his tracks. On the wall of a trendy clothing store was a giant poster. The poster was huge. It had the CRUX brand name on it in large letters.

“Ah, hello.”

Someone called out to him and Fujishima turned round. A man with curly hair came out.

“We don’t have any of the limited edition CRUX items. But we have lots of others.”

“I was just looking...”

Fujishima walked away. That had been the CRUX marketing campaign for their limited edition items. Kusuda and his brother ran the company. The CRUX nude photo was displayed all over. Kusuda told him that the limited edition items had sold out straight away. Lots of people had asked who the nude models were. Interest had died down a bit now. It felt like the aftermath of a storm to Fujishima.

To be honest, Fujishima didn’t feel like that the man in the photo was him. That was why when he heard people talk about the poster, he could speak as if it genuinely wasn’t him. Tohru was the same way. He

just looked at the large posters without saying anything about it.

A tall man walked past Fujishima. He recognized that figure. It was Tohru.

"Tohru!"

The man stopped and turned around. The man was the same height and similar age to Tohru, but it wasn't Tohru.

"Ah, I'm sorry. I mistook you for someone else."

Fujishima walked on. He arrived at the station he had arranged to meet Tohru at about ten minutes early. Fujishima scoured the crowds of people. In the distance he saw someone like him. He stopped himself from calling out when he realized that it was the same man he had mistaken for Tohru only minutes earlier.

It looked like the man was waiting for someone else too. Fujishima watched as the other man's face grew into a smile and he raised his arm up to wave.

"Did you wait long?"

Fujishima wondered if they were lovers, too. The second man was wearing a sports tracksuit and had very short hair. Fujishima's attention was caught by the camera case by his side. It was the same as Tohru's. Maybe he was a photographer as well.

"Not long."

The first man smiled.

"You smell different," the second man said.

"I changed your aftershave. Is that weird?"

"Not at all."

The two men walked past Fujishima. Fujishima breathed in. The man was wearing the CRUX limited

edition fragrance.

"What are you looking at?" Tohru broke Fujishima's contemplation. "You were zoned out. Are you tired?" Tohru questioned Fujishima.

"I'm fine."

Tohru looked at Fujishima, and then sighed.

"Fine. Let's go and eat."

They walked through the crowds together. Tohru walked a little faster than Fujishima. Fujishima didn't try to catch up. When Tohru noticed the growing distance, he stopped and waited for Fujishima to catch up. He then walked slightly slower.

Tohru had stopped calling Fujishima so much. He started calling every few hours instead of every hour while Fujishima was at work. Now Tohru called once a day. There were some days Tohru wouldn't call at all.

In the mornings and evenings he made food. The food was rough and was mostly vegetables, but the recipes that Tohru could make were steadily increasing. When they came in from outside, he told Fujishima to wash his hands like a parent would to a child. But because of Tohru's efforts, Fujishima hadn't caught a cold all winter.

They stepped onto the street where their restaurant was. There was a bakery on the corner with lots of cakes in the windows. Fujishima was distracted by their sugary promise and walked straight into Tohru.

"What's the matter with you?"

"So-sorry."

Tohru stopped to look at the cakes in the window.

"Let's get one on the way home. I can't bake cakes,

but you like them.”

“Yeah...” Fujishima admitted with a little bit of guilt.

“You’re just like a kid,” Tohru said with a big smile.

END



-CRUX-

Blossoms

Story 1

The sun was setting, but it was still humid and sticky outside. He rarely wore suits and he felt sweaty under the layers of fabric. The train was crowded and the air conditioning didn't seem to be having much of an effect.

When he finally arrived at the hotel where the party was being held, he was ready to slump into bed. He regretted not getting Kurokawa to take him to the hotel.

He went to the reception desk and asked where the party was, and was given directions to a hall. The party had started not long ago, but already was in full swing. One of the attendants brought him a beer. He moved to a seat at the edge of the room. He let out a great sigh.

Taniguchi had been invited to this magazine's 20th anniversary party as he had once done some work for them. He worked freelance, so attending parties and networking was an important part of finding new clients. But he didn't enjoy being in crowded places like this one.

Taniguchi finished his beer. It filled his empty stomach. He had graduated ten years ago and been freelancing for eight years. He was just over thirty. He should be at the height of his career, but hardly anyone

knew his name.

Taniguchi's specialty was photographs of people. However, most of his work was in still life. Taniguchi wasn't important enough to be able to pick and choose his work yet. He was always so busy looking for work and pleasing clients that he had lost sight of what he wanted to photograph himself.

He recalled an incident that had happened the day before. He had taken a crowded train home. Taniguchi had looked up at the luggage rack absentmindedly for lack of any other place to look, and noticed a magazine discarded there. It wasn't the magazine that caught his eye though; it was the photo on the front cover. It was a photo that Taniguchi had taken. A portrait. He had taken it so long ago.

Taniguchi scanned the front of the magazine. All of the information was about the girl in the photo and not about the photographer. There wasn't a single mention of his name. It made Taniguchi feel miserable.

As soon as he had turned freelance, he had worked hard at getting his photos published. He had taken portfolios to lots of publishers in the past, but he was too embarrassed to do that now. These days, he was just one of many photographers who were trying to make a career for themselves.

One independent publisher had published a collection of his photos. He had been so happy, but it had sold barely any copies. Most of his subjects were regular people so although he wasn't expecting it to be a sellout hit, he did hope it would be a little more successful.

"If it isn't Taniguchi-kun!"

Taniguchi looked up and saw Shikayama approaching him.

"It's been a long time."

Taniguchi stood up quickly and bowed.

"You came to my exhibition recently. Thanks. Anyway, you look well."

"So do you, *sensei*."

"I could be better. Lots of people here today, huh."

Shikayama was over twenty years older than Taniguchi. Shikayama would turn fifty-two this year. He was a very famous photographer. For two years after Taniguchi had graduated, he had worked for Shikayama. Taniguchi had worked solo for eight years now, but Shikayama always offered advice and help.

Shikayama's specialty was photos of people. His life work was a series of pictures of dancing girls in Kyoto. He had won awards and had an amazing resume. Books of his photos had been published. Every year there was an exhibition of his new photos, and every year Taniguchi attended the exhibition. Shikayama could capture the movement, the emotions and even the sounds of the performances that the girls put on. Each photo was arresting.

"Oh!" Shikayama looked surprised. "You don't see him very often." He was squinting at a man over on the other side of the room.

"*Sensei*, who is he?"

"You won't know him. Two years ago he took a photo for a jewelry brand. The nude one..."

Taniguchi remembered it well.

"The models for CRUX?"

"That's right."

That poster had been the reason that new jewelry brand, CRUX, had shot into popularity. Everyone had wanted to know who the models were and who had taken the picture, but neither the models nor the photographer had come forward. There had been lots of speculation that the models were famous celebrities and that the photographer must have been accomplished.

Finally, Tohru Takahisa had been announced as the freelance photographer responsible for the photo, but the identities of the models had been kept as a closely guarded secret.

"Which one?"

Shikayama pointed at a tall man. Tohru Takahisa was well-known but he didn't make many of his photos public. Taniguchi was surprised that Takahisa wasn't older than him. He had assumed that Takahisa would be much older considering his talent. In fact, Takahisa looked the same age as himself. Taniguchi looked closer. Takahisa was dressed very casually and he was pouting. He looked like he was enjoying this party as much as Taniguchi was.

"He does all the shoots for CRUX."

"I've heard."

"His famous photo was good, but I prefer his more recent work." Shikayama nodded and continued, "I should introduce you. You're closer in age. I'm sure you'll have lots to talk about."

"Oh, okay."

Taniguchi followed Shikayama. The man must

have noticed them coming over as he bowed.

"It's been a long time. How are you?" Shikayama asked.

"Fine," the man answered.

"How about work?"

"...I've not been doing much..."

Shikayama grimaced at the straightforward answer. The man seemed to realize that he had made Shikayama feel awkward, and added, "But I take photos everyday..."

Shikayama smiled at this man as if he were his own son.

"There's someone I want you to meet. This is Masayuki Taniguchi-kun. He used to work in my studio but he's gone freelance now."

Taniguchi bowed and said, "Nice to meet you."

The man didn't reply and just looked at him. Taniguchi felt himself blush. He didn't know why this man was staring at him so intently.

"Taniguchi-kun, this is Tohru Takahisa. We worked together on a magazine shoot," Shikayama said.

"Did you work on the X-Real shoot?" Takahisa said suddenly. He was addressing Taniguchi.

"Huh?"

"With Nashimoto Yuria..."

"Yes, I did work on that. It was three years ago."

"I liked that."

Taniguchi had forgotten about those photos. He was ecstatic that his name had been remembered from those magazine photos.

"Th-thank you! I haven't had any major work..."

"I liked your pictures of people. Everyone is smiling in them..."

Taniguchi could feel Shikayama smiling next to him. Shikayama had said the exact same thing to him before.

"I like smiling faces," Taniguchi could feel himself blush even more as he spoke.

"I'm not good at photographing people. I wish I could take photos like you," Takahisa said.

Taniguchi shook his head.

"I don't do anything special. I'm not worth such praise."

Shikayama was called away by someone else. Taniguchi was usually good at talking to new people but he felt nervous in front of Takahisa. Takahisa had this unwelcoming aura.

"Wanna sit down?" Taniguchi invited Takahisa. "I hate crowds."

"I don't like situations like this. There are too many people. It makes my head hurt."

"I'm only here for work. It's a necessary evil in this industry. When I have to turn up, I like to sit on the side and watch."

"Have you taken any photos of people recently?"

"I want to, but I haven't had many shoots recently. My current work doesn't seem to be attracting clients..."

"You only take photos for work?"

"Most of my photos are for work, but not all. I saw your CRUX poster. That was really cool."

Takahisa frowned.

"I only get taking still lifes. My teacher always tells me that my photos of people don't have enough life in them."

"But the CRUX poster was nudes. I know nudes are their own category. But I think it still counts as people. The 'Love & Hate' catchphrase worked perfectly with it..."

Takahisa sighed.

"I never meant for the picture to be published. That was a private photo," Takahisa stated.

Taniguchi was surprised that such a powerful photo hadn't been intended for publication.

Taniguchi remembered when the photo had caused a stir. Part of the stir was the fact that the models were nude. Perhaps if they hadn't been nude, there wouldn't have been so much excitement.

He didn't remember the picture precisely, but he remembered the composition with one person in front of the other, the one in the back kissing the one in the front. He remembered that the man behind had strong arms. However, it wasn't obvious whether the person in front was a man or a woman.

The person in front was slim and looked feminine were it not for the lack of curves. Any hint of a bosom was covered by the man's arms, but it didn't look like there could be much there. On the other hand, there were plenty of female models with no chest.

The jewelry and fragrance that the campaign promoted were unisex so the picture was perfect, appealing to both men and woman. In just one campaign, CRUX was launched into the big time.

"The Vice President of CRUX is a man called Kusuda. He's my friend. He asked if he could use one of my photos in a marketing campaign. I collected some up to show him but I didn't pay enough attention, and I accidentally included one from my private collection. That was the one he wanted to use. Life plays funny tricks on us."

Listening to Takahisa's story, Taniguchi thought that it could only be fate. He remembered reading in an interview once that a good photo was forty-five percent luck and fifty percent talent. The other five percent was hard work. It had been luck that the CRUX Vice President was his friend, and luck that the man needed a photo for his marketing campaign. It had been luck that he had included a private photo in his portfolio. It was this series of events based on luck that the famous photo had come to be published.

Some people would work hard and never achieve what Takahisa had, and there were others who got there without trying. Tanaguchi thought that it wasn't fair. If he didn't get some luck soon, he would end up running a camera shop in the middle of nowhere at this rate.

"Oh, Takahisa-san. And Tanaguchi-san, too!"

Editor Nishine had noticed them and was coming over. Tanaguchi had worked for him on a hot springs photo shoot for a magazine. Nishine was in his mid-thirties. He was a little tubby, and very kind.

"Takahisa-san, this must have been the first time you met Tanaguchi-san. I was looking for you so I could introduce you to each other."

Takahisa didn't look happy to see Nishine.

"Shikayama-sensei introduced us."

"I see. Tanaguchi-san, you worked with Shikayama-sensei, didn't you? What does it feel like to meet someone who you admired for so long?"

"Nishine-san!" Takahisa shouted. If Takahisa wanted Nishine to stop talking, it didn't work. Nishine just smiled.

"Takahisa-san is a fan of yours, Tanaguchi-san. He's wanted to meet you for a long time. Everyone knows how much he hates parties, but when he heard you would be here, he decided to put in the effort. I lent him my copy of your collection and he still hasn't returned it..."

"I did return it," Takahisa yelled.

Suddenly Taniguchi started talking. He was surprised to hear himself speaking!

"If you like them, I have lots more portfolios at home. I can give you two or three. But maybe you wouldn't want them taking space on your bookshelf..."

Nishine walked away grinning to himself. Takahisa looked depressed. He scratched his head.

Taniguchi heard Takahisa mutter how 'uncool' that was. There was silence for a while, but it didn't feel awkward.

Finally, Takahisa broke the silence.

"I would like a couple of copies."

He opened his front door. Inside the apartment it was dark. Taniguchi felt relieved that his lover's shoes

weren't in the hall. It wasn't that Taniguchi was doing anything wrong, but he didn't want to have to explain it to Kurokawa.

"It's not very big here. Sorry..."

Takahisa followed Taniguchi into the one-room apartment. Taniguchi wished that he had tidied up a bit, but he hadn't expected that he would bring someone home with him.

At the party Taniguchi had given Takahisa his business card. Takahisa said he didn't have any business cards, but Taniguchi saved Takahisa's number and email address into his cell.

Taniguchi had offered to bring the books to Takahisa. Takahisa had stared at the business card and then asked if they could get out of there.

It was obvious that Takahisa wasn't kidding. He was serious. Taniguchi wasn't in the mood for business either. He was so elated that he had someone he could count as a fan, too. He readily agreed to leave the party and they both went back to his place.

"Would you like something cool to drink?" Taniguchi asked, as he took two beers out of the fridge.

Takahisa said that he wanted to look at Taniguchi's photos first.

Taniguchi agreed, with a bit of hesitation. He took out the collections he still had from his closet, but Takahisa said he wanted to see different photos. Taniguchi then took the photos out that he had archived. Takahisa looked like a kid in a chocolate factory as he flicked through the photos, examining each one carefully.

"This one was in a magazine."

Takahisa pointed at the same picture that had been on the cover of the discarded magazine.

"The color in this one is better."

"I took it outside. I had to wait a long time for the light to be right."

"The colors are prettier here."

Taniguchi agreed with Takahisa. However, the editor had liked the model's red clothes. They had cropped Taniguchi's image so only the red part was used in the print. Taniguchi hadn't liked it, but he didn't want to upset the editor.

Takahisa kept flicking through the photos. He didn't touch his beer once; he was too engrossed in the photos. Taniguchi downed his. He felt as stressed as a college student who hadn't reviewed enough for his finals.

Takahisa suddenly stopped on one picture. It was a photo of an elderly woman smiling.

"This is good."

It was a photo he had taken when he was traveling in Shinshu a few years back. The woman had found out that he and her grandson were the same age. She smiled this wonderful smile, and Taniguchi had just managed to capture it on film. It was a photo of a moment. His collection of photos from Shinshu had often been used in magazines. However, this one had been omitted because there wasn't much of a background so it wasn't obviously Shinshu. That's how this photo had ended up in his archive.

"I like this one, too," Takahisa muttered. Taniguchi looked up and smiled at him. "Your photos really capture

the subject. You capture their emotions. I like that. My photos are all about me."

"What do you mean?"

Takahisa thought for a moment.

"I didn't notice until I was told. But whatever I take betrays my emotions. It's like a mirror. Anger, sadness... All of the things I try to hide are reflected in my photos. Even if I only take pictures of streets and rocks, part of me will be in the photo. But your pictures capture the person and their emotions. There's nothing egotistical about your work. You're very good."

Takahisa finally pulled the ring pull on his beer can.

"I want to take pictures like yours."

Taniguchi gulped. He couldn't quite believe what Takahisa was saying. Taniguchi wasn't someone people were jealous of. He didn't even know where he was going in his life.

"I think you're much better. You understand the trends."

Takahisa snorted.

"In the end it just gets forgotten. There's no worth in trends."

Takahisa was so blunt and confident of his opinions. Taniguchi wanted to change the subject.

"You said that you take photos everyday not for work."

"I don't have anything else to do," Takahisa said, and gulped down his beer.

"If you can't use them for work, why don't you hold an exhibition?"

"Exhibition?"

Takahisa screwed up his eyes at this suggestion.

"I know you could do it, Takahisa-san."

"I never thought about it..."

"You wouldn't have to do it on your own. You could do a group exhibition."

Takahisa shook his head. "No way. I wouldn't want to have my work associated with photos that I didn't like. I need too much control."

Click...

The sound of the front door. Taniguchi reflexively turned around.

"I'm back. I thought you were going to be out late. I wasn't expecting to see you here," Yuichi Kurokawa said, as he entered the apartment. He must have noticed the shoes, Taniguchi thought. Taniguchi ran to the front door.

"I have a friend here, so go home," Taniguchi muttered. Kurokawa's expression clouded over at the reprimand.

"You said you had a party and would be back late."

"The party wasn't any good, so we left early."

Kurokawa glanced in the living room to see Takahisa.

"I won't get in your way."

"It doesn't matter. I won't be able to relax if you're here."

Kurokawa squinted.

"What's the matter with me being here?"

"It's not like that..."

"I'm not leaving."

Kurokawa pushed Taniguchi aside and entered the apartment.

"Hello," Kurokawa greeted Takahisa, and then sat down with determination on the edge of the bed.

Taniguchi was angry that Kurokawa had started an argument in front of a stranger.

"Everything okay?" Takahisa glanced over at Kurokawa.

"He's a friend. Don't worry about it." Taniguchi was keen to get the conversation back to the original topic. "If you have photos in your archive, you should use them and exhibit them. If you don't have enough money, I'm sure a publisher would help you out. I just love the emotion in your work."

"Have you done one before?"

"Yes, I did several joint exhibitions with school friends. We didn't have any publishers interested in our work, but it was fun."

"Why don't we put on an exhibition together?"

Taniguchi couldn't quite comprehend what Takahisa was asking him at first.

"But..."

"If I'm going to do it, I want to do it with you."

Takahisa certainly didn't mince his words, Taniguchi thought. Suddenly a cell phone rang. It was Takahisa's cell. He said a few words into it, and hung up. Takahisa stared at his phone and muttered something about the time.

"I've got to get home before the last train."

Takahisa stood up and looked at Taniguchi.

"I went to the party because I wanted to meet you. I'm glad that we talked. I didn't know what you would think of me. But I'm happy that we got to meet. I'm serious about the exhibition, too. If you want to do it, just let me know."

Holding a couple of the photo collections, Takahisa went home. Taniguchi couldn't quite believe what had happened in just one short day. They had met, they had talked, and they had even discussed holding an exhibition together. But he didn't know anything about Takahisa. All he really knew was that he was straight to the point, he had taken the CRUX picture, and that he was a very difficult man to please.

Taniguchi downed the rest of his beer. He'd thought that he would calm down once Takahisa had gone but he was too excited. If they were to do an exhibition together, where would they do it? What would they do about budget? And did Taniguchi even want to do it?

"Who was that person?" Kurokawa asked.

Taniguchi had almost forgotten he was there in the excitement.

"Another photographer."

"What's his name?"

"Tohru Takahisa."

"Never heard of him."

"He's not well known, but in photography circles he's famous."

"You've never mentioned his name before."

"Today was the first time I met him."

If they were to do an exhibition, they would have to choose a theme. It had to be suitable for an

exhibition... But if it was a joint exhibition, they would have to work something out together. The only piece of work by Takahisa that Taniguchi knew was the CRUX image. Maybe after Taniguchi had looked at Takahisa's work, they could find a common thread...

"Do you usually bring people you've only just met to your place?"

Kurokawa interrupted Taniguchi's thoughts. Taniguchi didn't understand what Kurokawa meant.

"What do you mean?"

"You chase *me* out because of some party, but you let *him* in?"

Taniguchi now understood what his problem was.

"You've got it wrong. If you were listening, you'd understand. We're talking about doing an exhibition together."

"He didn't look very excited about the idea."

"It's got nothing to do with you."

Taniguchi couldn't stand being near Kurokawa now. He needed space... He fled to the bathroom and shut the door in Kurokawa's face.

The bathroom was tiny, and there was barely enough room in it for Taniguchi to remove his clothes. Taniguchi was just so angry at Kurokawa. They had argued before the party, too.

The real reason was that a week ago Kurokawa had asked if they could live together. They had been dating so it was only a matter of time before the subject was broached. Kurokawa spent so much time with him that they were basically living together anyway. Taniguchi didn't think that it would change much, but he still didn't

want to take that step. He had refused.

It wasn't that he didn't like Kurokawa. But no matter how many times he explained his reasons to Kurokawa, Kurokawa would keep asking him why. It was irritating.

He knew that Kurokawa was probably outside the door waiting for him as he washed his hair. Even so, he took a bath for an hour. When he was done, he left the bathroom totally naked. Curled up by the door was Kurokawa. If Kurokawa was a child, Taniguchi might have felt sympathy. But this was a man and one who was three years older than him. It was pathetic.

"Sorry," Kurokawa muttered. His face was red and he looked like he had been crying.

"What are you apologizing for?"

"For not trusting you. I know you wouldn't do anything. My imagination just ran away with me..."

"Are you mad...?"

"I'm mad."

More tears fell from Kurokawa's eyes.

"I'm sorry. I'm sorry. Please forgive me..."

"It's okay. You're not a kid. Don't cry."

Kurokawa was stroking Taniguchi's legs. Slowly he moved up and took Taniguchi's member in his mouth. Taniguchi's penis was soft and flaccid from the hot water of the bath.

"Stop it."

Taniguchi said *stop it*, but his body didn't say no.

"I said, stop it."

It was too late. The excitement moved across his body and his penis started to stiffen. Kurokawa moved

his fingers into Taniguchi's crack. Taniguchi's knees started to shake. He couldn't hold his weight and he squatted down on the floor.

Kurokawa hugged him. Taniguchi breathed in Kurokawa's scent. Kurokawa started kissing every part of Taniguchi's body.

"Fine, but let's do it on the bed."

Taniguchi washed the sweat off his body. He went back to bed but he couldn't sleep.

He turned the air conditioner on to low and it rattled into action. They had been lovers for two years... His lover was a man, but they suited each other and the sex was good. When Kurokawa had asked if Taniguchi liked him, he'd been able to say yes without hesitation. But recently Taniguchi hadn't been feeling the way he used to about Kurokawa.

They did it twice or three times a week. Taniguchi thought that was quite a lot of times, but Kurokawa said that it wasn't enough. Kurokawa wanted to do it every day. If they didn't see each other, he would call Taniguchi four or five times, just to hear his voice.

Taniguchi was happy that Kurokawa liked him so much and was so besotted with him. However, Taniguchi wasn't happy that the only person he saw was his lover. He didn't think that was right.

Their bodies shuffled together in the bed. Kurokawa pulled Taniguchi closer.

"So soft," Kurokawa said happily. "You're always

so soft and warm after sex. I like it when you're hard, but I like it when you're soft like this."

"What are you talking about?"

"Can I put it in again?"

"Wait. I need some recovery time."

"You don't need to move. I just want to put it in."

"No, I don't want to."

"Why?"

"It'll fall out."

"It won't."

"I'm tired. I want to lie down."

"Then lie on your side."

"In a minute."

Kurokawa nibbled on Taniguchi's neck. Taniguchi looked at Kurokawa. Taniguchi knew how attracted he was to Kurokawa. He just wished that Kurokawa wouldn't cry so much.

"Can we talk about it again?"

Taniguchi didn't want to talk about living together again. He thought they had already come to a conclusion.

"We already decided."

"I'm here most of the time anyway. Why can't we live together?"

Taniguchi sighed.

"I just think there are more cons than pros to us living together. I've got a job so I don't want to move either."

"I'll come here."

"Think about it seriously. You can't live here. Your job is miles away. You'd be tired all the time and you

wouldn't be able to do your job. Let's just leave things as they are."

"I stay here lots as it is. We'd even have more time together."

"It's not that I don't like you. It's just, I think we wouldn't work if we were in each other's pockets all the time."

Kurokawa looked upset.

"I do like you. Don't get the wrong idea."

"I'll quit my job."

"What would you do?"

"Live here."

Taniguchi smacked Kurokawa.

"Do you listen to anything I say? You can't just devote yourself entirely to me. You need other things like work!"

Kurokawa bit on his lip.

"You're getting the balance all wrong. Love and work, you need to think about these things. You shouldn't just date me. You should see other people. You should expand your horizons."

"Sure..." Kurokawa finally said, after a long pause.

Taniguchi did like Kurokawa a lot. He loved being with him. He wondered what life would have been like if Kurokawa had been a woman. They probably would have gotten married by now. But Kurokawa wasn't a woman, and Taniguchi didn't have to think too far into the future.

Taniguchi wondered if he would still be taking photos for a living in ten years. Or whether he would

give up and be running a camera store in some backwater place. Perhaps he wouldn't be working with cameras at all and doing something totally different. He wondered if Kurokawa would be with him then.

He kissed Kurokawa's cheek. It was a gentle kiss, but it was enough to make Kurokawa hard.

"You can put it in now."

Taniguchi felt Kurokawa push inside of him. He closed his eyes. He lost himself in the ecstasy. The pleasure helped him exorcise at least some of his worries.

A week after the party, Taniguchi got a phone call from Takahisa. Taniguchi was taking a break when he called, so his timing couldn't have been more perfect. Takahisa said he wanted to talk, so they arranged to meet that evening.

Work ran over and he was five minutes late to his meeting with Takahisa. Tohru Takahisa was standing at the ticket gates. He was wearing a T-shirt and jeans. He had a small bag over his shoulder. There was nothing special about what he was wearing, but Taniguchi thought he looked very stylish.

"Sorry I'm late," Taniguchi apologized.

"No problem," Takahisa replied. "I know a good bar. Shall we go there?"

"Sure."

Takahisa led the way. Taniguchi wasn't happy with himself. He'd been late. He'd only been late by five

minutes, but he was still late. Takahisa was probably mad at him, he thought. Taniguchi wondered if he should apologize again. But before he got a chance, Takahisa had stepped into a bar. Taniguchi glanced up at the sign. The bar was called Ginnan.

The bar was quaint. There were no tables free, so Takahisa sat down at the bar.

"Oh! Tohru-kun."

The old bartender had been wiping the sweat from his forehead. As soon as he saw Takahisa, he called out to greet him.

"Hi."

"Not with Kusu-chan tonight?"

"He's been busy recently."

"You tell him to come and see me more often. Anyway, what can I get for you? I recommend the sashimi tonight."

"I'll have the beef and a beer. What do you want?"

"Umm..." Taniguchi hesitated, and glanced at the menu boards on the wall.

"The chicken is delicious here."

Taniguchi followed Takahisa's recommendation and ordered chicken with egg.

Taniguchi looked over at Takahisa. He was smiling and looked very comfortable.

"Do you come here often?"

"Yeah. I don't like drinking in places I don't know."

Taniguchi thought that Takahisa must be shy to feel that way. Taniguchi racked his brains for something

he could say to ease Takahisa's shyness with new people. He thought, and thought, and thought, but nothing came to him.

Takahisa said nothing until he finished his beer and ordered another.

"Same again."

Takahisa reached into his bag and took out a large file.

"You only know my CRUX photo, right?" Takahisa handed him the file.

"Tha-thank you."

The file contained photos. Taniguchi was taken aback as soon as he opened the file. He turned each page carefully. The only word he could think of to describe the photos was 'unique.' For some reason they made Taniguchi feel sad. These were different from the CRUX photo. Very different.

"I changed the color bar and adjusted the blue tone. I think it made the pictures more interesting."

The final shots in the file were all of stones. They were just stones in a cream room. There was one set aside from a line of neat stones. It was very different. There was not a single picture of a person. But Taniguchi felt that these pictures of rocks were photos of a person. Taniguchi thought back to what Takahisa had said before about how the photos betrayed his feelings.

He swallowed. These were amazing. This wasn't what he wanted to do himself, but Taniguchi could appreciate that these photos were special. Taniguchi closed the file. He had no doubt that Takahisa had extraordinary talent. But that understanding saddened

him, because no matter how hard he worked, he would never be able to produce anything as special as these photos. Tohru Takahisa had something unique.

He returned the file and said nothing.

"I was serious about doing an exhibition together, but I wasn't sure what you would think of my work."

That wasn't the problem, Tanaguchi thought. He was the problem. His work was nowhere near as good as Takahisa's. He would pull Takahisa back.

"I know it's out of the blue, but if you want to, just say..."

Taniguchi finished his beer. It was his second but he didn't feel any effects at all. He felt tense.

"Your work is amazing... Why do you want to exhibit your work next to mine? I don't understand." Taniguchi was speaking from his heart.

"My photos are nothing special. Anyone could take them."

Takahisa smiled. That smile made Taniguchi want to burst into tears.

"Not anyone could take these. Only you could take photos like these."

There was silence. The sounds of the conversations nearby filled the space between them.

"When I see your pictures, I know you had a good upbringing. Your parents loved you. Perhaps I'm jealous."

It was true; Tanaguchi's family had been nothing extraordinary. He had had a good relationship with his parents. He had one brother and they were friends. He had taken that for granted. He didn't think anyone could

be jealous of it. Taniguchi wondered what had happened in Takahisa's childhood that would make him jealous.

His phone rang. It was Kurokawa. Tanaguchi apologized to Takahisa, and went outside.

"Still at work?"

"I finished work and I'm drinking with a friend. Where are you?"

"Your place. I thought you were coming home early."

Kurokawa sounded dejected.

"Sorry. You should go home."

"Are you going to be back that late?"

"I'm just not in the mood."

"Has something happened?"

"I just don't want to see anyone. Don't call me again."

Taniguchi hung up, and went back into the bar. Takahisa was drinking and smoking a cigarette. Takahisa had all the marks of a genius. Tanaguchi was a little frightened of him.

"Sorry. I had to take that."

As he was apologizing, his phone rang again. It was Kurokawa. Taniguchi turned his phone off.

"You don't have to take that?"

"It's just someone who doesn't get the message."

"A lover?"

Taniguchi's heart skipped a beat. He wondered if Takahisa had seen the name on the phone, but then he remembered that he hadn't saved Kurokawa's number to his phone so that wasn't possible. There were a lot of gay people nowadays. But Taniguchi didn't want someone

he'd only met twice to know that sort of personal information about him.

"Something like that."

"I see."

"Takahisa-san, are you dating someone?"

"Yes."

Taniguchi went with the conversation flow. He imagined that the lover of such a straightforward man would be someone more retiring.

"Good looking?"

"Perhaps. I don't think I'm attracted to what normal people think is good looking."

"Have you been dating long?"

Takahisa looked like he was counting for a moment, but then gave up.

"I've forgotten. You?"

"Two years. We're having jealousy issues, though. It's making things difficult. I need more space. I can't just be with one person all the time. I think we should keep our options open, see other people and see different things. That makes a person and keeps the attraction going. Or that's what I think at least..."

"Attraction is very individual. It's not something that you can dictate."

Takahisa looked straight at Taniguchi as he spoke. He was too impressed by Takahisa to argue. He just wanted Kurokawa to be more independent.

Takahisa drank another beer. Taniguchi wasn't sure how much he had drunk by now.

"Maybe you're normal."

"Normal?"

"There are lots of different people in this world and all of them have something to offer."

The conversation strayed from the subject of lovers. They talked about photos until it was past midnight. They left the bar and it was then that Taniguchi realized how much he had had to drink.

"Takahisa-san, you have so much talent," Taniguchi said on the way back to the station. Takahisa turned around to face him.

"It's real talent. You can see it from your photos... There is something special there... I'm jealous. I wish I could be you."

Takahisa started to laugh. It wasn't a normal laugh; there was something eerie about it.

"When I was ten, I was abandoned. My stepmother almost killed me. I spent most of my school days in dormitories. When I was twenty-two, I killed someone in an accident and had amnesia for six years."

Takahisa smiled.

"You still want to be me? I'll trade places if you want."

Taniguchi couldn't take all this information in. It was terrible.

"I'm joking!"

Taniguchi didn't see the funny side. It all sounded like a bad drama. How could he have been so tactless as to say he wanted to be Takahisa?

"You need to walk faster. The train won't wait for us!"

Taniguchi picked up the pace and before he knew it, he had a ticket in his hand and he was on the train.

His was the next stop. He felt like crying. He didn't have any reason to cry... Next thing he knew, he was at his station.

The wind was strong. It blew his hair across his face. He had to keep pushing it behind his ears. He started running. He ran for no reason.

Suddenly he tripped, grazing his knees. It stung. He picked himself up and started walking again.

Finally he reached his building. He took the elevator to the fifth floor. He thrust his hand into his pocket looking for his keys. Before he could find them, he noticed that sitting in front of his door was a man.

As soon as he saw that he was here, Taniguchi was irritated. This was the last person he wanted to see.

"I told you to go home."

Kurokawa tried to kiss Taniguchi, but he moved his head to the side.

"I wanted some time alone."

"You didn't have to turn your cell off."

Kurokawa sounded resentful and upset.

"I told you I wasn't in the mood. You should just leave me alone. Why do you never get the message?"

Kurokawa didn't back down. "You know how I feel about you!"

"You should try and understand me, then!"

Taniguchi pushed Kurokawa aside and entered his apartment. He slammed the door and put the chain on as quickly as he could. Taniguchi couldn't even be bothered to take off his shoes. He just collapsed inside the doorway where he was. He felt like he could sleep right there, but he didn't like knowing that Kurokawa

was probably still sitting outside. He tried to picture him squatting out there.

"Crap."

Taniguchi stood up and opened the door. Kurokawa was sitting against the wall. He looked up at Taniguchi with a face like death. His eyes were red and puffy.

"You can't sit there all night."

Kurokawa sniffed. He wiped his face like a child and came in. Kurokawa was a tall man, but when he slouched as he was doing now, he looked small.

Taniguchi wondered why he was dating this man. He didn't think it was because he was attracted to men, but rather being with Kurokawa made him feel better about himself.

"Do you want to split up?"

Kurokawa shivered.

"Why?"

"I just thought I'd ask."

"Do you dislike me?" Kurokawa's eyes were starting to well up. He grabbed Taniguchi's chest and dug his fingers in.

"Ow! Let me go!"

"Tell me why you asked!"

Taniguchi was irritated. He hadn't meant for what he said to be taken so seriously.

"I was joking."

Kurokawa released him, but Taniguchi could feel the imprints of Kurokawa's fingers in his flesh.

"I just wanted to see how you reacted."

"Why would you say that?!"

"I said it was a joke!"

"I like you so much. You know that, so why would you say that?! It's just cruel."

"Sorry..."

Taniguchi saw no option but to apologize. "I've been thinking..."

Kurokawa looked up. Taniguchi saw a large tear roll down his cheek.

"You don't know anything about me."

"That's not true. I like you!"

"How can you like me? You barely know me."

"That's not true."

Kurokawa pushed his lips onto Taniguchi's. It was an urgent kiss. Kurokawa used his strength to push Taniguchi onto the floor.

"Ku-Kurokawa?"

Kurokawa started pulling Taniguchi's clothes off. Taniguchi couldn't resist in his drunken state.

"Hey. Stop. I don't want to."

Kurokawa pulled off his pants and pushed his finger into Taniguchi's hole.

"I was being serious! I don't want to do this."

Kurokawa had always stopped when Taniguchi said no before. But he clearly wasn't going to stop tonight. He felt fear that he had lost control of the situation.

"No...No..."

Kurokawa penetrated him. It was the same man Taniguchi had made love to many times before, but now he felt like a stranger. Tears rolled down Taniguchi's cheeks.

"Masayuki, I'm sorry..." Kurokawa whispered in Taniguchi's ear. Taniguchi felt Kurokawa pull himself

out. Taniguchi turned around to face his attacker. Kurokawa was crying as well.

"You bastard!"

Taniguchi's fear had turned to anger. He kissed Kurokawa with as much strength as he could muster.

Finally he withdrew his lips. It had been a long kiss. Taniguchi was nervous. It felt like he had kissed a stranger.

"I've wanted to kiss you all night. I've wanted to be inside you all night. But you don't feel the same. You say you like me but you don't want the same."

Kurokawa's fingers slowly stroked Taniguchi's face.

"You say that you need a balance between work and love, but I like you more than my work and family. All I need is you. All I need is to be with you."

Kurokawa kissed Taniguchi's cheek.

"Even if you couldn't work, I would be with you. Even if you committed a crime, I would want you. I would follow you to the ends of the earth. Even if you say you didn't want me anymore, I wouldn't give you up."

"I..." Taniguchi looked up. "I just don't think that I am what you want."

"I don't care who you are. I want to be with you. I want to be with you more than any career."

Kurokawa wrapped Taniguchi up in his arms.

"I need you to understand. I'm not someone who has a balance between love and work. I just want to be in love. You must know that."

The hug felt like it was the first time they were

together. Taniguchi had always thought that Kurokawa didn't do anything because Taniguchi was there. He hadn't seen him achieve anything in their time together. Could it really be that Kurokawa couldn't do anything?

"I just wish you'd enjoy being with me as much as I enjoy being with you."

Taniguchi woke up on the floor. This had happened before, but it'd been a while since he had slept on the floor. He stretched his tense muscles. As he did, the man next to him woke up. He took his cell from the pocket of his discarded jeans; it was eight o'clock in the morning. A crack in the curtains let in the morning light. He kissed the man next to him. The man suddenly grabbed his penis.

"I said no more..."

His brain said no, but his body said yes. The man's long thin finger easily penetrated him. The finger was pulled out and something much larger was pushed in. Taniguchi could hear the sounds of the morning rush hour outside. For some reason, he felt embarrassed. Taniguchi covered his face with his arm. Kurokawa didn't stop thrusting inside of him until he came.

Kurokawa lifted his chin up. Their eyes met. Taniguchi kissed Kurokawa. He didn't want to look at him. It just made him feel more ashamed if he did.

"I'm really sore," Taniguchi said.

"Sorry."

Closing his eyes, Taniguchi felt tired. He had work

that afternoon but he was so tired.

"You have work," Taniguchi said angrily. Kurokawa looked surprised.

"Today is Saturday."

Taniguchi had totally forgotten. He sighed...

"I don't think I have any talent for photography." Taniguchi was surprised at his honesty and courage to admit his fears.

"And?" Kurokawa cocked his head.

Taniguchi smiled. It was so important to him but it meant nothing to Kurokawa. Taniguchi relaxed a little. Even if he ended up running a camera shop, or tried a totally different career, Kurokawa was always going to be with him.

"Kiss me!" Taniguchi demanded.

Kurokawa smiled. They pushed their lips together. Their tongues met. When they pulled apart, it was tinged with regret.

"Live here. With me."

The words fell out of Taniguchi's mouth so easily.

Kurokawa looked astonished. He clearly hadn't been expecting this.

"Are you sure?"

"As long as you can put up with me? I shout when I'm in a bad mood. I don't take baths sometimes. I have to go on trips and leave you to your own devices."

Kurokawa said nothing, but he looked delighted.

There was heavy rain that evening. The sound of the rain beating down on the window reverberated through the room.

"Can't sleep?"

"The rain woke me up."

He turned around to face away from the window. His penis touched his lover's skin. He felt the excitement creep through his body. He opened his legs and what he wanted was quickly given.

"Mmm..."

No matter how excited he felt, nothing happened below. Even when he came, Tohru's penis remained flaccid.

"You only get hard when you're going to enter me."

Tohru felt his lover pulling him closer.

"Are you sure you like it?"

"It feels good, whether I'm hard or not."

"I'm sorry that I couldn't please you."

The problem wasn't erections or whether he was being pleased. But he understood his partner felt upset that he didn't appear to be doing it for Tohru.

"You came home late today."

"I met Taniguchi."

"That was the photographer you liked, right?"

"Yes."

"That's great! Did you have fun?"

"He's weird."

"How?"

"He said that he wanted to be me. I told him we could trade places if he wanted to."

Tohru's partner stroked his cheek.

"I wouldn't like that."

"Why?"

"You must know why."

Tohru pulled his lover into him and kissed his white flesh. Tohru liked lying together like this.

"Do you like me?"

Tohru gave no answer. Instead, they kissed.

"Why do you keep asking me?"

Tohru held his partner tightly and took in the sweet smell of his body. The rain continued to beat down on the window.

Story 2

He didn't think that he would be coordinating an exhibition nine months after they met.

It was the final day of the exhibition. Taniguchi left home early so he could get something to eat. He stopped in front of the gallery. He knew that he couldn't avoid going in. He had to help with the clean up.

*Tohru Takahisa and Masayuki Taniguchi –
temperature*

Taniguchi always felt a little embarrassed when he saw his name up on the sign. He didn't feel worthy.

If he had tried to do an exhibition alone, he would never have been able to get such a prominent gallery.

Working with Tohru Takahisa had opened doors for him.

The photography world knew Takahisa from his work on the CRUX marketing campaign. However, Takahisa had remained elusive since, so when the public display of his work had been announced there had been a lot of interest. Takahisa's commercial work was mostly limited to CRUX and he had developed his own style. The quality of his work was extraordinarily high.

This was the first exhibition of the prodigy. Tohru hated talking to people, so Taniguchi had done most of the marketing. He hadn't had to do too much work, though. Mentioning Tohru's name was enough to open all the doors he wanted.

The exhibition hall had been divided. On the right side was Tohru's work; on the left side was Taniguchi's work. In the middle they had placed a large bouquet, which a florist friend had prepared specially for them. It was the item that brought their work together.

The bouquet's center flowers were tulips. Taniguchi especially loved it. It was a fantastic focus for the exhibition. Tulips were also the perfect spring flower.

He walked around Tohru's work slowly. He never tired of looking at Tohru's work. The photos had such an impact on him. He couldn't take his eyes off of them.

He had seen them so many times already, but each time he looked he found something new to enjoy. Finally, he returned to his own photos. None of them were as impressive as Tohru's. He hadn't been able to take one picture that he was satisfied with.

Establishing a concept hadn't been easy. Tohru had said they should just take pictures of what they liked. But Taniguchi hadn't been happy with that. He was worried that Tohru's work and his work were very different. Taniguchi felt that if they took whatever photos they wanted, there would be no coherence to the exhibition and it wouldn't work. He had plenty of experience with joint exhibitions so he knew this well.

Tohru had been very stubborn. It had taken a month for Taniguchi to convince him, and they finally settled on the concept of 'temperature,' and flowers would be their subject. Tohru had continued with his photography as normal without focusing his efforts on the exhibition. However, Taniguchi started taking photos of flowers exclusively.

Taniguchi had had to fit the exhibition work in between his paid work. Taniguchi would never forget Tohru's reaction when he showed him his first shots - Tohru had taken one look at his photos before discarding the file and declaring that they were shit.

Taniguchi knew that he didn't have as much talent as Tohru. He had only agreed to the joint exhibition because Tohru had said he liked his work. Taniguchi certainly didn't have confidence in his own work, but he was still shocked that Tohru had gone so far as to call them shit.

Taniguchi had protested that Tohru only looked at them once.

Tohru replied, saying that if he didn't like them the first time, he wasn't going to like them a second time.

The conversation had then descended into an

argument.

"Tell me what the hell is wrong, then! Don't just say they're shit!"

"I don't know why they're shit. They just don't say anything."

Taniguchi had done so much work to prepare those photos, but Tohru had rejected them in one glance. He had stormed out of the cafe they were in without saying anything else. He was too angry.

He took the train and returned to his apartment. He had moved to a bigger apartment when he started living with Kurokawa. He was still angry when he got off the train.

He relaxed a little when he saw that his housemate hadn't gotten back yet. It was too early for that.

The next day he had to take some pictures for a travel magazine. He had to meet the writer at five in the morning. He would take pictures of landscapes, food and buildings. Usually he would get irritated by this sort of work, but he was looking forward to it this time. Getting out in the fresh air would do him some good.

Taniguchi took some beer from the fridge. He sat and drank three cans. He then nibbled at some cheese he'd also found in the fridge. He didn't remember buying it himself, so it must be Kurokawa's. That wasn't going to stop him from eating it, though.

He fell asleep on the floor right there. Next thing he knew, he was being shaken awake.

"Masayuki?" The voice was urgent and full of concern.

Kurokawa was wearing purple jeans. His work

bag was on the floor next to him.

"You gave me a shock! What are you doing sleeping on the floor? I thought you had collapsed."

Taniguchi slowly stood up. The kitchen floor was hard to sleep on. His hips and shoulders were sore.

"I'm sorry. I ate your cheese."

"That's okay. I can buy some more if you like it."

Taniguchi loved to hear these gentle words after the day he had had. He hugged Kurokawa tightly. Usually he didn't feel much sexual desire, but today was different.

"I want to do it," Taniguchi whispered in Kurokawa's ear.

"Are you sure? You have work tomorrow."

"Yes." Taniguchi grinned.

They only did it once. Taniguchi couldn't stay awake. It was already past eleven when they finished. Taniguchi was very hungry. Kurokawa fetched some bento boxes from the convenience store for them to eat.

After he had eaten, he chose the equipment he wanted to take with him the next day.

"What?"

"These were under the kitchen table."

Kurokawa held the photos that Tohru had said were crap.

"Did you meet Takahisa-san today?"

Not much got past Kurokawa.

"...Yeah..."

"Did something happen?"

There was silence. Kurokawa came and sat down next to Taniguchi.

"I think Takahisa-san's photos are amazing, but I don't like them."

"...Everyone is different..."

"I don't like these photos either."

"Huh?" Taniguchi turned around. "These are my photos..."

Kurokawa looked surprised at this revelation.

"Really? They look a lot like Takahisa-san's work. I wouldn't have thought they were yours. I'm sorry."

"Don't worry about it."

Taniguchi opened the file and looked at the photos with fresh eyes. Kurokawa was right! Taniguchi hadn't noticed it, but the compositions and the colors weren't his. These were not his photos. Looking at them again, Taniguchi realized why Tohru had called them crap.

Taniguchi had been so worried that his work wouldn't look right next to Tohru's, that that was all he had been thinking of when he had been working. He had turned into a Tohru Takahisa copy. He hadn't seen it himself.

He knew this wasn't good enough. None of these photos were good enough. He had to get better.

One month after their spat in the cafe, Taniguchi had phoned Tohru and asked to meet him.

He handed his file over to Tohru. Tohru took it without a word. Taniguchi clenched his hands tightly as he watched Tohru turn each page. He could barely breathe. Tohru was taking his time looking at these

photos. He was stopping on each page and inspecting the photos carefully.

Taniguchi wiped a bead of sweat that threatened to roll off his chin. It wasn't warm; he was just tense. The only time he had been this stressed was in his job interview for Shikayama.

"Where did you take this one?"

Tohru had spread the photos out on the table.

"In Okutama. I liked the scene."

"It's good."

Taniguchi had been stressed all month. He could barely sleep and often got up in the middle of the night to take photos. He had been home so infrequently that Kurokawa had even suspected that Taniguchi was having an affair. Taniguchi had simply been focused on the task at hand.

"This one?"

He thought that these would be all right. He felt that these photos were better. But what he feared most – more than crowds of people examining and criticizing his work – was Tohru's assessment of his efforts. That was the most frightening prospect.

Their joint exhibition was three months away. Taniguchi had been working single-mindedly on this. There was timing and luck involved in a good photo. He had been so absorbed; it was a miracle that he had managed to make all the preparations for the exhibition.

Suddenly the owner of the Comfort Gallery called out to him. His name was Ogawa-san. He was fifty-two and always impeccably dressed.

"Hello."

Taniguchi nodded.

"It's over today. Your joint exhibition has been a success. It's been good business for me."

Taniguchi thought to himself that Ogawa should be directing this praise to Tohru. It was Tohru's name that had brought the crowds in, after all.

"An editor from Kondou publishing wants to get in touch with you," Ogawa continued.

"Me? Not Tohru?"

"He definitely wanted you. I checked!"

Taniguchi had to do a double take. Was this just a cruel prank?

"He wanted me to give you his business card."

Taniguchi stared at the business card, astounded. It had to be about work! Barely any publishers had given him a business card. The editor must be serious. Taniguchi couldn't hide his delight.

"Takahisa-san does have the natural talent."

Taniguchi looked up. By the bouquet he saw two men talking. One of them was in a dark suit and wore glasses with silver frames. He looked around forty. Taniguchi had a feeling that he had seen him before. He racked his brain – it was an editor from Mesei! A huge publishing house! Taniguchi had gone to their offices once to try and get some work, but he had quickly been shown the door.

"There's something edgy about your shots."

The other man was Tohru. Taniguchi didn't have to look to know that Tohru was pulling his usual bad-tempered expression.

"I'll be back in a minute."

Taniguchi quickly made his excuses. He left the hall. He wanted to speak with Tohru, but he didn't want to get in the way of his chance with the editor.

"I've wanted to ask you something. Why did you do an exhibition with Taniguchi-san?"

Hearing his name, he turned round instinctively. The two men had their backs to him so he couldn't see their expressions. Tohru was silent.

"Your directions are so different. You are far more famous than Taniguchi. Were you friends at school?"

Taniguchi thought the man could show some tact, but he couldn't disagree. Tohru's talent was far greater than Taniguchi's. His name was much better known. Taniguchi knew that before planning the exhibition. He knew that he would have the opportunity to reach a lot more people if he did an exhibition with Tohru. Taniguchi strained his ears. He was desperate to know Tohru's answer himself.

"Have you seen Taniguchi's work?" Tohru finally said.

"Yes, I visited the exhibition. His work wasn't bad or good. Just average."

Taniguchi felt his heart sink. He wanted to get away from there. But Tohru's response stopped him in his tracks.

"That's your problem."

"Huh?"

"If you can't see the emotion in his work, you're the one with the problem."

The editor was silent.

"I'm not much better myself. But you really are a

hopeless case.”

The editor had said that his work was average. Tohru had disagreed. Tohru had said his work was good. Perhaps Taniguchi wasn't as talentless as he feared.

The next day, he took a deep breath, picked up his portfolio and approached a fashion editor who had admired his work. Soon he had a meeting to organize a shoot for some subculture fashion company.

“Thank you so much for agreeing to work with us.”

The editor was a young woman. She was very pleasant and attractive. She was in the habit of twisting her hair around her fingers.

“I saw the exhibition you ran at the Comfort Gallery. It was really good.”

Finally, Taniguchi was getting the exposure he needed!

“My boyfriend is a photographer's assistant. He really liked Takahisa's work, so we went to check out the exhibition. I really liked Takahisa's work. I'd heard your name before, but I'd never seen such amazing work.”

It was wonderful to hear that people liked his work. Taniguchi felt he would never tire of it.

“You better call me Taniguchi-sensei from now on!”

“Okay,” the editor laughed. “You know, I thought Takahisa's work was good, but I preferred yours. There was something I could relate to in your pictures.”

Taniguchi thanked the editor for her kind words. He knew that every person had his preferences and not everyone would like his work. But he was so happy to

find some who did.

The meeting had gone on for an hour. Taniguchi hadn't eaten breakfast, so he was very hungry. He went to a *kyudon* place in front of the station.

His route home took him past the gallery. Two girls in uniforms came out of the gallery. They looked like they were still in high school.

“Tohru Takahisa is so good looking.”

“You know what he looks like?”

“I don't, but the owner was talking to a tall man. I heard him call him ‘Takahisa-kun,’ so that must have been him!”

“I wish I'd seen him! He's over thirty years old, though. Way old!”

Taniguchi realized that a man of their age would seem old to teenagers.

“The photos were so good! So many flowers!”

Taniguchi watched the girls walk past. He wanted to thank them for enjoying the exhibition, but he managed to resist the urge.

People had asked him a lot why the exhibition was titled, “temperature.” Taniguchi explained that Tohru was cold and he was hot. They had wanted people to feel a temperature change walking between the two areas.

Story 3

Tohru was about to go out in the clothes that he had slept in. Just as he was about to leave, he thought

better of it and returned to put on a clean T-shirt and pants. As he changed, he could feel Fujishima's gaze on his back.

"Are you going out?"

"Yeah."

"Are you meeting someone?"

"Taniguchi is back this afternoon."

Tohru approached the bed and stroked Fujishima. If he was honest, he would have preferred to stay in bed today, but Taniguchi had asked to meet so he had to go out.

"I was thinking of going out today. Do you want to meet for lunch?"

Tohru was ignoring Fujishima. He started to run his tongue along Fujishima's lips.

"That tickles!" Fujishima giggled. Tohru couldn't stop himself and he fell back into bed.

"To-Tohru."

Tohru kissed Fujishima hard. He started to undo his trousers. He liked it when Fujishima resisted him.

"You can't... You're going to be late."

Tohru realized Fujishima was right. With a sigh, he stood up and pulled his clothes back on.

"Take your cell. I'll call you."

It was hot outside. He was covered in sweat before he even reached the station. Fujishima had told Tohru he was going out. Tohru wondered where Fujishima was going today.

They had planned to meet at a cafe in front of the station. It was a friendly cafe where they didn't mind people nursing a mug of coffee for an hour, so it was perfect for Tohru and Taniguchi's meetings.

Since the office was established, they'd had most of their meetings there. It had been a long time since they'd arranged to meet up outside of the office.

Taniguchi was already there. He was sitting at their usual table – the one in the back of the cafe in the right-hand corner.

"Thanks for coming," Taniguchi smiled. Next to him was Kurokawa. Tohru had met Kurokawa several times at Taniguchi's apartment. He seemed a complete contrast to Taniguchi's upbeat personality. They made an odd couple. However, their relationship seemed to be going well as they had moved in together.

"I wanted to talk to you about the office," Taniguchi started.

Taniguchi and Tohru had set up an office together six months ago. Tohru had always admired Taniguchi's work, and after meeting at a party they quickly become firm friends. In March they had held a three-week exhibition together. Tohru had spent the entirety of the exhibition watching the reactions of the people who came. Some people had walked past the displays totally disinterested, while others had spent their time examining each shot. Tohru had found people's reactions interesting.

After the exhibition, they had gone drinking to celebrate. The conversation had turned to going into business together. Tohru had been working freelance for a while now,

but he had always despised the marketing side of the job. Working together would make life easier, he thought, and with Taniguchi as his partner, how could it fail?

Taniguchi had found suitable premises and done all the necessary paperwork. In two months, 'Office Crew' had been established. It was still just an empty shell with no staff at the moment, though.

"I think we should get an accountant."

"Oh, yeah?"

Tohru had no interest in the day-to-day running of the office. He had left all of that to Taniguchi.

"I've been doing all the paperwork myself, but I think we should get someone in. They could also manage our schedules."

"That's fine, but how would we pay them?"

"We wouldn't have to pay anything until the office is turning a profit."

Kurokawa had been quiet until now. He tried to speak, but Taniguchi told him to shut up.

"I thought we could get Kurokawa to do our accounting. He's studied accounting. We wouldn't need to pay him much, and I know he would work hard."

Tohru took some cigarettes from his back pocket. He lit one.

"What do you do at the moment?"

Taniguchi didn't like it that Tohru was addressing Kurokawa directly.

"I'm going to quit my job at the end of the month."

"So you're going to quit your stable job, even though you may not get an income from this new one."

"Yes."

"I think you should reconsider."

"This is what I want to do."

Tohru wondered why he would want to work with photographers so badly.

"I told him that. He shouldn't quit his job. But he didn't listen and he already handed in his resignation. He won't withdraw it." Taniguchi looked troubled, too.

"You need me," Kurokawa pouted. "You've been working so hard for someone who does nothing! You've let your own work slip. You can't keep doing the work of two people."

Tohru was startled by this sudden outburst.

"Kurokawa, shut up!"

Kurokawa hadn't finished, though. "You can't keep doing everything! A business is more than one person. This guy is just using you! You do everything."

Kurokawa's speech was cut short by a sharp slap to the back of his head from Taniguchi.

"I told you to be quiet," Taniguchi snarled at him.

"I knew from the beginning that Tohru wouldn't do the paperwork and admin. I don't mind. But I wouldn't be doing this without Tohru. I swear, you just want to do anything you can to embarrass me."

Kurokawa's lip started to tremble. He looked like a small child who had just been chastised by his mother.

"I'm only busy because you want to quit your job and be with me. That's not Tohru's fault."

"I want to be with you and I do think about what I'm doing. If we stay like this, you won't be able to do the work you want to do. I want you to be able to

do the work you love. That's why I did this. I like my accountancy studies. Knowing that I'm doing it to help you makes me happy."

Kurokawa hesitated, but then continued.

"I worked hard at my job. I had a reason. But it's not what I want to do. There isn't anything that I have a passion for. This is the first thing I've found that I can see myself doing in the future. I like your photos. I want to help you. I don't want anyone else to do that for you."

Tohru watched the scene with curiosity. If he hadn't known better, he might have assumed that Kurokawa was a crazy stalker. He was about to light a cigarette when his cell rang. When he checked it, he could see that it was a text message from Fujishima, asking if he wanted to meet at the hamburger restaurant near Comfort Gallery at twelve.

"Hey," Tohru butted in. "Was there anything else you wanted to talk about?"

"Umm... No."

"As long as he's happy with a small salary, it's fine by me."

"Thank you! I'm sorry he's so rude. He'll control himself in future."

Kurokawa looked as if he was about to say something, but Taniguchi glared at him and Kurokawa seemed to think better of it.

"See you..."

Tohru was there a little before twelve, but

Fujishima was already waiting for him. The burgers here were delicious, so the place was always busy; but they found two open seats at the counter.

"Who did you meet?"

"I just went shopping. What did Taniguchi want to talk to you about?"

"Just work."

Tohru didn't want to recall the argument he had just witnessed between Taniguchi and their new accountant. Tohru had always tried to avoid money management and paperwork, but he knew that he should probably be doing more. He had been lucky that Taniguchi took on that aspect of the business. Tohru hoped that he would never have to do it.

"Am I useless?"

Fujishima looked surprised, but then smiled.

"Why are you laughing?" Tohru demanded.

"Nothing. Did Taniguchi say that to you?"

Fujishima didn't wait for an answer. "I don't think you're useless. You're just not good at everything. That's normal. But you're going into business with Taniguchi, so you should probably take some more responsibility."

Kurokawa had basically accused Tohru of using Taniguchi. In Tohru's defense, he had thought that Taniguchi enjoyed all that paperwork.

"Taniguchi-kun really likes you."

Tohru looked up.

"He said it at the exhibition. He liked your photos, but he also liked you. He was telling the truth. He's a good friend."

Tohru needed something for his hands to do. He

lit a cigarette.

His life had been full of so much trauma and obstacles. He always had this feeling that his new life was overshadowed by another version of himself: the person he was when he had amnesia. He didn't have anyone in his life that had made friends with him for who he was now.

But Taniguchi was different. He didn't know about Tohru's traumatic childhood and amnesia. He liked him for who he was now.

"You're cute."

This wasn't something Tohru had heard before.

"I think you're cute."

Tohru blushed. He couldn't look at Fujishima. He finished his cigarette and lit another.

Tohru knew that he had made it.

Story 4

Tohru finished his shoot and returned to the office. It was already seven o'clock. Tohru had barely noticed the time pass.

"I'm going home."

"See you!"

It seemed that Taniguchi wanted to keep working. Tohru had picked up his coat when Kurokawa stopped him.

"The marketing manager from A/Z Company, Matsumura-san, wants a meeting. Takahisa-san, can I

make an appointment?"

Tohru didn't like the tone in his voice. He liked to pick and choose his work and Kurokawa didn't like this. He didn't like him much when he had first met him. However, Tohru couldn't deny that he worked hard and had good control of the running of the office. Tohru couldn't complain, but that didn't stop him sulking.

"Whenever is fine."

"You've changed your mind before. Please put it in your schedule now."

Tohru ripped his schedule book from his bag and slammed it on his desk.

"Takahisa-san!"

Tohru ignored him and stormed out of the office. Outside it was snowing. He put his coat on as he ran down the stairs.

"Hey."

A voice came from above him. Taniguchi was leaning out the second floor window.

"Kurokawa is sorry! I've written it in for you!"

Tohru stepped forward to catch the schedule book that Taniguchi dropped. Unfortunately, he stepped on some ice and slipped, landing straight on his ass.

Taniguchi laughed and waved.

"Have a good Christmas!"

He willed the train to go faster. He kept checking his watch in the taxi.

It was eight o'clock when he arrived at the store.

The lights were already off, but there was a dim light on in the entrance. It seemed brighter than it was because of the darkness everywhere else.

He jumped out of the taxi. He was going to knock on the door, but thought better of it because he might disturb people. He could see shadows through the glass so he waved at them.

"Ah. Tohru-chan! You just made it."

The automatic doors slid open.

"I heard that you might be coming, but you were so late I didn't think you'd make it." The lady with the store apron beckoned him in.

"Christmas chocolate cake, right?"

"Yeah."

She took a box from behind the register.

"Let me find my wallet."

"Don't worry about it. It's my Christmas present to you."

"I couldn't..."

"You can. Please take it."

Tohru felt awkward, but he couldn't force her to take his money. The people in this store remembered the person he was after the accident. It made Tohru feel bad.

"Excuse me."

A young girl stepped into the shop.

"Do you have any Christmas cake left?"

"I'm sorry. We only had enough for those customers who ordered in advance..."

From the back of the store appeared an old man. He noticed Tohru's presence immediately.

"You came."

"Yes," Tohru muttered.

When he had amnesia, he had worked here. But when his memories came back, he completely forgot the memories of the life he'd lived during the amnesia. Tohru had heard from others that the owners had loved him, and that he had made cakes, but he didn't remember any of it. The owners knew now that he had had amnesia and had forgotten these things.

"There's liqueur in that cake."

Tohru looked down at the top of the box. He couldn't see the cake but he imagined it.

"You won't be able to taste the alcohol but it improves the flavor. It's our best seller at the moment."

"I see."

"I heard that you're a photographer now. Do you like it?"

"I do."

She smiled. The elderly man started to retreat back into the store backroom, but Tohru stopped him.

"Let me pay you."

"This is a sample. I couldn't take money for it."

"But..."

"Just come and chat with me sometimes..."

The old man left and returned to the back, leaving Tohru and the lady.

"Don't worry about the money. Just make sure you come by more often. Don't worry that you don't bake cakes anymore. We're just happy to see you."

Tohru arrived back at his apartment. Opening the door, he was bathed in a soft light that was so different from outside. He breathed in the warm air. He entered the living room and saw a man sleeping on the sofa. On the dining table was dinner. His partner couldn't cook, so it was ready-made, but he had laid it out beautifully.

Tohru put the cake box down on the table and sat down next to the sleeping man. The man's breathing was regular. Tohru watched his chest rise and fall. His skin was so soft. His lips almost translucent. Tohru bent down and gently kissed him. Slowly the man woke up.

"Hello." The man reached up and stroked Tohru's cheek. "It must be cold outside."

"It's not that bad."

Tohru didn't feel right. He embraced Fujishima.

"Did something happen?" Fujishima must have sensed something.

He said nothing but pulled Fujishima closer.

"I brought a cake from Port."

"Did you see the owners? I bet they would have been happy to see you."

"I don't know. I only got the cake for you."

Tohru meant to sound casual, but it didn't work. Fujishima knew how much Tohru cared for him.

Tohru squeezed Fujishima. He didn't want to ever let go.

END

Postscript

Thank you very much for buying my latest book, *Cold Fever*. This is the sequel to *Cold Sleep* and *Cold Light*. I hope this will satisfy your desire to know what happened next!

This final volume is the result of many stories I've written for magazines and book collections. This book tied together the two other people who appeared in *Cold Sleep* and *Cold Light*. I especially liked Taniguchi's character and the way we could continue to follow Tohru's story through another's eyes. The *Cold Sleep* series has seen Tohru grow and develop.

The series is three volumes long, but *Cold Fever* was the one I really wanted to write. The first two books were leading up to this one. I wanted to make sure that this book had a real impact. I wanted to portray a couple who were in love, but not happy. I think they reach a happy ending, though.

Anyway, thank you very much for reading! I hope that you'll pick up another one of my books in the future.

February 1st

Narise Konohara